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THE WORKS OF

STANLEY HOUGHTON

VOLUME

I

This Edition consists of one thousand and forty copies, of which one thousand are for sale.

From a photograph taken in April, 1913. Schmidt, Manchester.

Stanley Houghton

THE WORKS OF
STANLEY HOUGHTON

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

HAROLD BRIGHOUSE

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I

LONDON
CONSTABLE AND CO. LTD.
1914

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v. 1

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INTRODUCTION

William Stanley Houghton was born, an only son with one sister, at Ashton-upon-Mersey, in Cheshire, on 22nd February 1881. He sprang from an old Lancashire family, originally settled at Preston, of which town he was an hereditary freeman. Down to the beginning of the eighteenth century the name in the rolls of the Preston Guild is spelt 'Hoghton': between the Guilds of 1702 and 1722 the 'u' crept in, and the name henceforth appears as Houghton. It is pronounced Hawton. As a boy he was delicate, and, though no specific ailment manifested itself apart from an attack of chorea, suffered from recurring periods of a kind of influenza accompanied by a high temperature and followed by prostration. His ill-health was, together with his parents' changes of residence, responsible for his migrations from school to school. He was educated successively at the Bowdon College, the Stockport Grammar School, the Wilmslow Grammar School, and the Manchester Grammar School. For some time he resided at Wilmslow, a Cheshire suburb of Manchester, with which another famous dramatist, Mr. Hubert Henry Davies, had early associations. Later on, in 1896,

his parents removed to Alexandra Park, Manchester, and Houghton was sent to the Manchester Grammar School, where he was contemporary with Mr. B. Iden Payne, his future producer, and Mr. Gilbert Cannan, whose play *Miles Dixon* was to be produced together with *The Younger Generation*. At each school, in spite of frequent absence, he was a great prize-winner, and appeared destined for a university career. Classics, however, were not a strong point, and at the Manchester Grammar School he was placed upon the Modern side. Asked to choose between entering his father's business, which naturally, in Manchester, is connected with the cotton trade, and the selection of a profession, he decided without hesitation upon business, with the intention, even at that time fully formed, of regarding the cotton trade as a mere stop-gap till he had perfected himself in the profession of letters.

The close of 1897, when he was nearly sixteen, saw him installed in his father's office in Meal Street, Manchester, which is now built over. He wrote somewhere an amusing description of the emotions experienced on his translation from an exalted position on the Modern side of the Grammar School to the functions of a junior office boy; and, though custom brought tolerance for a business life, he began, almost at once, the long apprenticeship through which he hoped to find emancipation from the cotton trade. The freedom for which he worked was not to come to him until the June of 1912; and some idea of how

much his 'luck' was hard work is to be had when it is remembered that, whatever his other activities, he was, from 1897 to 1912, with the exception of a business man's holidays, in daily attendance between the hours of 9 A.M. and 5 P.M. at his father's office. Through practically the whole of his working life he burnt the candle at both ends: he may indeed be said to have invented a candle combustible at once in four places.

The work itself—his position was that of a salesman—was neither arduous nor unpleasant, and had the immense advantage of bringing him, through his calls on shipping merchants and his membership of the Cotton Exchange, into intimate contact with men and affairs; but he worked, however willingly, under the strain of a constantly growing feeling that the selling of 'grey cloth' was something foreign from his true province.

No doubt he might, earlier than he did, have cut the cable and swam securely on the troubled seas of free-lance journalism. Two considerations held him back: the one a feeling that it was through drama, and drama alone, that he was to win his proper place; the other an innate Lancashire shrewdness which made him hesitate to leave security for hazard. But if writing, his fixed idea, ruled his life, Houghton was no recluse, and played a normal part in the occupations and pastimes of a young man.

Probably Houghton had no great affection for athletics, but he had a strong belief in the value of

exercise. At school he played cricket, dropping it later for lawn-tennis, at which he played a strong left-handed game with various clubs in the Whalley Range district of Manchester. Hockey, however, was the game which he played with most skill (again left-handedly) and keenness through the season, often, in addition to his club matches, joining a team from the Gaiety Theatre in mid-week contests, and playing in London with the Beckenham Club. Football he never played, and he failed to shine at golf, though twice, with some years' interval, he tried to reach a respectable handicap. Perhaps at his favourite games enthusiasm outran discretion. It is said that two sets of tennis left him exhausted, and a hard game of hockey was sometimes followed by collapse. He was a good walker; and perhaps had Mr. Anthony Ellis, who in an appreciation in the *English Review* referred to him as 'parading certain pleasant signs of dandyism,' seen Houghton tramping the Yorkshire moors attired in a Norfolk jacket, a battered deerstalker, hockey 'shorts,' and nailed boots, he would have shrunk from generalising in a phrase which nowadays suggests a euphemism for a 'nut'; and, though even a professional 'nut' may be supposed to have his 'off' hours, Houghton dressed in fact with self-respect, neatly, without fastidiousness, and certainly without exaggeration. It was not until after success had come to him that any great opportunity offered for travel—and then it came too late. But, apart from the Lake District,

North Wales, and Yorkshire resorts so readily accessible from Manchester, he had spent more than one holiday in the Channel Isles, for which he had a great affection, and had visited Paris, Normandy, and Norway. He was a competent amateur draughtsman, and a sketch-book was an invariable travelling companion. He used both pencil and pen and ink.

Socially, Houghton was widely popular, but he was at his best in the fewer intimate friendships he made than in a large gathering. In a crowded room he sought a chair upon the fringe of things, and sat alert, observing silently. He played bridge well. But, in general, he was reserved to the point of secretion. It was only when one knew him very well, and then only for a few, that the habitual reserve fell from him, and one discovered what a conversationalist he could be.

Politically, he was not active, but may be said to have professed Socialism and practised Liberalism. Politics interested him mildly as a rule, but the general election of January 1910 roused Houghton to an almost hysterical fervour which expressed itself in the columns of the *Manchester Guardian* in a series of parodies of which the following is a specimen :

There was a simple Peer
Who was honest and sincere,
But a little bit deficient as to brain ;
He studied every day
All that Balfour had to say,
And read letters from a Mr. Chamberlain.

And he thought that Tory speakers meant exactly what
they said
When they told the world that British trade was dying, if
not dead.

And he very clearly saw
(After hearing Bonar Law)
That to buy things from abroad is a mistake;
'A Havana-made cigar
For the future I will bar,
I will only smoke cigars of British make.
They use the leaf of cabbage in cigars of native brand,
And that will find some Britisher employment on the land.

'I will never drink again
Any claret or champagne,
And every foreign vintage I 'll decline;
I very often bought
Eighteen-eighty-seven port,
But I 'll buy in future only British wine.
For that will find employment for some Britishers (said he)
A-plucking elderberries from the elderberry tree.

'To let Caruso sing
Is an ill-considered thing,
Or to listen to La Tetrazzini's trills;
Those who Paderewski hear
Are not patriots, I fear,
Nor are those who take delight in Bernhardt's thrills.
For perhaps some village Irving of his livelihood they rob,
Or some mute inglorious Santley who is looking for a job.'

Naturally, his fervour took a literary form; inevitably, for such an occasion, it did not take a high form. Election squibs must be popular or nothing. In the same article in the *English Review*

already referred to, a rather wild view of Houghton's political thinking is taken. A ' rebel ' he never was. For a short time he was a member of the Clarion Club, and there are traces, at least, of Socialist, and especially feminist, thinking in *Independent Means*; but one always felt that Houghton's excursions, both in fact and idea, into the by-ways were made not so much from even passing conviction as solely and deliberately for purposes of observation. He was, as every artist must be, the looker-on.

On two occasions he used the correspondence columns of the *Manchester Guardian* in defence of freedom. The first had reference to the withholding of a drink licence from the Gaiety Theatre. ' Though I distrust,' he wrote, ' both the extreme teetotal interest and the brewing interest, I distrust the extreme teetotal interest the more heartily. I regard it as intolerable that Messrs. —— should oblige me not to call for a glass of beer inside the Gaiety Theatre. Consider the alternative. Suppose that these gentlemen were only permitted to enter the Gaiety on condition that they did have a drink; and, if they declined, suppose that they were held while the liquor was poured down their throats. They would consider, and rightly, that their personal liberty was being interfered with grossly. But there is not an atom of difference between the justice or logic of this supposed case, and that of the state of affairs now prevailing.' The Gaiety got its licence.

The second occasion was when the Libraries

Committee of the Manchester City Council proposed to ban Mr. H. G. Wells' *The New Machiavelli*. Houghton's letter 'drew' Dr. Moulton from his fastness of Didsbury College, and Dr. Moulton, in turn, 'drew' Mr. Arnold Bennett.

Practically from the time of his leaving school, Houghton was a member of the Manchester Athenæum, a many-sided institution, which he used for its news-room, its library, and its amateur dramatic society. In 1908 he was one of a number of men who founded a luncheon-club, under the name of the Swan Club, for daily discussion of food and art round a table whose size limited severely the membership. The 'Swan' emblem which appears on his plays was designed by a fellow-member of the club, Mr. Ernest Marriott, by whom one had to be caricatured before reaching full membership. Here, as elsewhere, Houghton's constant habit, not of isolation, for an observer must not isolate himself, but of insulation, made him perhaps the least clubbable of the band, but he found old friends and made new and enduring friendships round the Swan Club table.

It was noteworthy how, after his success, reserve left him. Even before London had smiled his Manchester achievements had made him the best-known of the club, and in his anxiety not to presume inside upon his reputation outside, he was, at times, almost morbidly shy, expressing opinions only after pressure, and then with diffidence. London had

cured him of self-consciousness, and no memories of Houghton are more pleasant than those of the few visits he paid to the Swan Club table after he had ceased to live in Manchester. Success, which mars so many, mellowed him. It was as if Manchester had stunted him; released from it, he developed as far in six months of London and Paris as in six years of Manchester. Unrecognised by the world he was, as a clubman, difficult: successful, he became a comrade, a talker, giving out from himself where before he was too often, through sheer shyness, contented only to receive.

In 1912 he became a member of the Savage Club, finding its lack of pomp congenial, and in the same year was made, greatly to his delight, a member of that very select band, the Dramatists' Club.

With the production of *Hindle Wakes* in June 1912 came Houghton's opportunity to release himself from business. Characteristically, he made assurance doubly sure before he took the final step. The London Press rang with his praises, but Houghton waited for more substantial guarantees. When, however, besides *Hindle Wakes,* an arrangement was made for the Haymarket production of *The Younger Generation,* he shook from his feet the dust of the cotton trade; and after writing, in the first flush of his success and his freedom, the genial play *The Perfect Cure,* left Manchester for London. Exactly what was the origin of the obscure disease which struck him down is a matter on which doctors disagree,

and the layman may theorise freely. He had suffered, before *Hindle Wakes* came, from complicated tooth trouble: a small operation was suggested, but the pain had ceased, and the operation did not take place. Possibly, and it is at least as reasonable a theory as the suggestion that toxin was introduced later through eating bad food, the poisonous matter was first present in his system so long before his death as the autumn of 1912. At any rate, whether or not the ill-health at this time was the origin of, or merely incidental to, the fatal illness, from then onwards Houghton was a sick man. Evidence is to be found in the plays which he wrote for Mr. Arthur Bourchier. The plays were written rapidly, but he always wrote fast, and that hitherto had not damaged his work. With ill-health there was also the extraordinary mental and characteristic development already noted, the one, no doubt, acting and reacting on the other. It was an abnormal Houghton who tasted the fruits of the normal Houghton's triumphs.

He took first a flat in Charing Cross Road, but found, after a very few months spent in discovering London, that the central position, if convenient for him, was convenient for others to come and interrupt him. Steady work was impossible to a man who found himself lionised by society, caricatured by Mr. Max Beerbohm, badgered by editors, tempted by commissions from managers (most of which he declined), and courted by his own profession. The whirl for a time amused him, but it did not satisfy.

He found a bewildering array of acquaintances and, amongst men of the theatre, a few true friends—Mr. Cyril Hogg, his first publisher, Mr. Edward Knoblauch, Mr. Frank Vernon. But he tired quickly of a life lived so much in the limelight, and, after a Christmas visit to Manchester, fled early in 1913 to Paris, staying at a little hotel in the Palais Royal, in order to be near his friend Mr. Edward Knoblauch. A flat in Paris was a dream of his Manchester days. He took one shortly, six flights up, in the Place d'Italie on the Rive Gauche, but, before furnishing, felt ill and went to recuperate at his loved St. Brelade's Bay, Jersey, from which, after a first depressed letter, he wrote cheerfully of the enlivening company of a party of Cambridge undergraduates. Returned to Paris he enjoyed hugely his furnishing expeditions, was better in health, and wrote optimistic letters with gay little serio-comic plans of the 'Flat at No. 6 Rue Bobillot, Paris, in the occupancy of Stanley Houghton, Esq.' This flat he was to occupy for just one month. A dream indeed! Here is a quotation from a letter he wrote in May 1913 describing his routine. He had mentioned meeting Mr. James Pryde, Mr. William Nicholson, and other people, and had been accused of associating with 'nobs.' In reply:

'Damn your "nobs." There 's only Knoblauch, and I haven't seen him for a fortnight. I am too busy now to go across the water. I get up at eight, prepare my chocolate, shave, and dress; the *femme*

de ménage comes at nine; I go to work in the study till about a quarter to twelve, then lunch in the dining-room (she does excellent light lunches); and, after coffee and a liqueur and rest on the balcony, I continue work for as long as I feel inclined, perhaps till four, when I may have tea, or else go out for a walk, or to see some one, and have tea there. For dinner I usually go about a mile and a half away, to the corner of Bd. du Montparnasse and Bd. Raspail, where there are two or three good and cheap places. There is also one below in the Place d'Italie if I don't want to go away. But generally I like to go away; to walk if I have had no other exercise, or I can take the Métro or a tram if I am tired or it is wet. Then after dinner, if I am with people, perhaps to a café or a studio, and so home to bed, sometimes very late (when one has gone on to the Bal Bullier or the Panthéon), sometimes reasonably early.

'This sounds as if I know lots of people. I don't, but there is a little group of four or five, American girl artists and Englishmen, and then a young German, and one can ring the changes. I can already see that my place here is admirably chosen; it is just enough out of the way to prevent people dropping in on the chance of finding me at home. Really, this is the first time I have found peace since I left Manchester, and the proof is that I want to work and am actually doing so, even in spite of the time taken up by domestic affairs. At what, you say? At a novel. *Life*, by Stanley Houghton.

I 'm afraid it 's been used. I am quite absorbed in it, and work at it as I haven't done at anything since *Hindle Wakes*. One has the feeling that nothing can ever spoil the work when you 've done it, no worry of rehearsals and actors can ever come between your effect and the public. Of course I don't mean that I shall stop writing plays . . . '

The novel, of which six chapters will be found in the succeeding pages, was to extend to sixty thousand words; and though an attempt has been made to trace its intended course, the brief synopsis must be taken as a hint, and no more, of its scope. Houghton's notes for the plot are the equivalent of the first rough jottings it was his habit to make in the case of a play before elaborating into a full scenario. But enough of the novel was written to prove that the visit to Jersey had mentally invigorated him, and that the book, if completed, would have secured for Houghton a reputation as a novelist hardly inferior to that which he enjoyed as a dramatist. That *Life* was not the only novel he had intended to write is shown by the following note from his commonplace book. ' For a novel: Framework of my article " Hawthorn Lodge," with the house getting bigger as the family disperses. Title, *Home*.'

In June he returned to London for rehearsals of *The Perfect Cure*, paid a flying visit to Manchester, and after production of the play returned to Paris. There he was ill, and thought his illness merely the result of a bad crossing. Feeling better after a

day's rest, he went on to Venice, where Mr. Edward Sheldon, the American dramatist, had invited him. Again he was ill, and the English doctor diagnosed, with some reserve, influenza. After a fortnight an instant operation for acute appendicitis became necessary. From this he was, to all appearances, making headway, when a second dangerous operation was performed without anæsthetic for the removal of an abscess at the base of the lung. His parents had been summoned and were present. Again, he seemed to recover, slowly but surely, and the poison, still present in the body, to be diminishing. Venice in the autumn is not a health resort, and in October he was brought for nursing and home surroundings to Manchester, standing the journey satisfactorily, and, to all seeming, well on the slow road to health. It was then, more than ever, that those friends who were allowed to see him were impressed with the amazing gain in breadth of outlook, of maturity. Faced with the certain prospect of a long convalescence, of at least a year out of the arena, he was more than patient. He was cheerful, not merely taking an invalid's privilege of being talked at, but insisting on brilliantly leading the conversation. Then, with but little warning, the poison reached the brain, meningitis set in, and he died on 11th December 1913. His remains were cremated, and his ashes lie in the grounds of the Manchester crematorium.

Apprenticeship

Houghton left school with the definite intention of becoming a writer. As a first step he became an enormous and catholic reader. He converted his schoolboy French into a practicable instrument. He made experiments in writing, already directing his efforts towards the stage, and in 1900-1 wrote little comic operas and farces which were performed by amateur actors of whom the author was one. These were followed by some one-act plays, *After Naseby, The Last Shot, The Blue Phial,* the nature of which is sufficiently indicated by their titles. They were garrulous, but, on the technical side, give clear signs of the extraordinary workmanship which was to characterise his maturer plays. Possibly, a young writer, beginning his experiments to-day, would not elect to enter the dramatic field through the medium of farce and melodrama. If so, it would be because his artistic birth came later than Houghton's. Young artists must imitate something: what was there to imitate in 1900 for a man living in the provinces and so cut off from the occasional 'uncommercial' productions of London? The Vedrenne-Barker management had not begun to reshape dramatic history at the Court Theatre; and perhaps, in any case, the truer wisdom lies in trying one's wings on lower ground.

In 1902-3 came the first three-act play, a mixture of comedy, melodrama, and farce, with a plot which,

wordy as its treatment is, has no little ingenuity. The dialogue is unequal, but shows Houghton's individual manner already forming itself. If here he derives from Wilde, the spare economy of the later plays is the vital characteristic of the writing. Each year, from 1903 to 1907, he wrote at least one short play. Of these, one, *The Old Testament and the New*, written in 1905, is printed in the following pages as an example of his early work. This period, closing with the end of 1907, is here arbitrarily taken to represent his novitiate. Not that he himself would have closed the list at this point. To the end he was, in his own judgment, still the industrious apprentice with his maturer work to come.

Drama was his aim, but play-writing was only one part of his training. There remain to be recorded in this section his activities as an amateur actor and his early work as a dramatic critic.

Amateur acting is either a social pastime, or it is a serious career. Houghton took it seriously, with the deliberate purpose of acting in as many plays as possible, and learning from each all it had to teach him of the playwright's craft. How seriously he took it may be judged from the fact that between 1901 and 1912 he appeared in over seventy parts, and after the first year or two they were not small parts. There are programmes recording his appearances in such parts as Vere Quecket in *The Schoolmistress*, The Duke of Guisebury in *The Dancing Girl*, Major Saranoff in *Arms and The Man*, the Waiter in *You*

Never Can Tell, Sir Daniel Ridgley in *His House in Order,* and Sir Jennings Pike in *Little Mary*: in addition to which he frequently acted as producer, and for a period found time to be Secretary to the Manchester Athenæum Dramatic Society. The more one thinks about it, the more amazing grows the sheer quantity of work which Houghton packed, always without apparent effort, into his short life. Omitting, as one must, the summer months, his seventy odd parts give an average of over one a month—all to be memorised and rehearsed, and Houghton was too great a hater of slovenliness to be anything but 'word-perfect' in his acting. The parts enumerated not only show how much his acting was in demand, but prove an unusual versatility, and the whole catalogue of his appearances undoubtedly offers a wider range of experience to an alert student than most professional actors could hope to secure in a similar period.

It was not merely the architecture of the plays which interested him. He studied with equal care the technique of the actor, and the result is to be seen in the admirable acting quality of his dialogue. Lines which appear certain of their effect at rehearsal sometimes fail to make their point apparent to an audience. Houghton wanted to know why, and never rested till he had hit upon the precise delivery which, to his mind, would have conveyed to the audience the full significance of the line. He brought to rehearsals of his own plays not only the knowledge

of his intentions, but a carefully considered scheme for the exact delivery of each particular line.

One or two further points should be mentioned. He must of course have had a genuine love of acting for its own sake. Long after he had become a practising dramatist he continued to act, and one of the happiest incidents of his later acting days was his appearance as James Henry Kennion in his own *The Younger Generation*. Much earlier he had already ' created ' on the stage a character of, partly at least, his own imagining. In October 1906 a play entitled *The Intriguers*, written by Houghton in collaboration with a well-known amateur actor, Mr. Frank Nasmith, was produced by the Athenæum Society. Both authors took part in the production. The play, which was in four acts, was melodrama, and may be described as a steeplechase over very rough country after a packet of stolen naval plans. There was, later, a romantic play in one act, *The Reckoning*, by the same collaborators, which had a professional production at the now extinct Queen's Theatre in Manchester in 1907, and afterwards a career as a music-hall sketch.

Houghton's early experience of dramatic criticism was won in the columns of a weekly paper, the *Manchester City News*, which he represented between March 1905 and September 1906 on some sixty occasions at the theatres, and also wrote about music-halls. Here again is evidence of the indomitable hunt for experience. The work was unpaid; he

was a supernumerary critic, the plums going to other hands; and the smaller Manchester music-halls and suburban theatres, to which he often went, can hardly have had much interest for him. But he was learning to write, to discover the difference between the written and the printed word, and to express his thoughts concisely in the small space allotted him.

The 'Manchester Guardian'

The 'later period' begins with his association with the *Manchester Guardian*, of which his opinion was that of Robert Brindley in Mr. Arnold Bennett's tale.[1] Houghton's enjoyment of his later success was as nothing to the pride he took in writing for the *Manchester Guardian*, and mixing with the men of the *Guardian*—Mr. C. E. Montague, Mr. G. H. Mair, Mr. Herbert Sidebotham, and, his closest friend amongst them all, Mr. A. N. Monkhouse, who in a few years was to head with Houghton the 'Manchester School' of drama. He never held an appointment on the staff, but, from 1907 to 1912, was a frequent 'occasional' contributor under the heads of dramatic criticism, book reviewing, and special articles.

Houghton had strong views on the propriety of a practising dramatist acting as dramatic critic, and

[1] 'I've often heard that it's a very good paper,' I said politely. 'It isn't a very good paper,' he laid me low. 'It's the best paper in the world.'

on this subject had a passage of arms with Mr. Hall Caine in 1910, which, though applying only to a special case, serves to illustrate his attitude. Houghton had a play at the Gaiety Theatre, Mr. Caine had one at the Princes'. (By the way, it is hardly necessary to explain that the words 'Gaiety Theatre,' when used in these pages, refer to Miss Horniman's theatre in Manchester, and not to the national institution in the Strand. Made clear at once, there is no need to write 'Manchester' with every reference to the theatre.) Houghton adversely criticised Mr. Caine's play in the *Manchester Guardian*; Mr. Caine promptly protested in the columns of another paper against the *Guardian's* putting one dramatist in a position to decry the wares of another. Houghton's reply, in the same paper, was as follows:

'Sir,—My attention has been drawn to Mr. Hall Caine's letter in your paper of yesterday. Mr. Caine, I observe, puts on one side all question of the æsthetic value of his plays and of my criticisms of his plays—and concentrates upon a point of journalistic ethics. I do not quite understand whether his quarrel is with me for going to the theatre, or with the editor of the *Manchester Guardian* for sending me, but, in any case, his letter concerning a particular case raises a larger issue which has been debated frequently, and which is still unsettled. May a man who is doing creative literary work of his own sit in judgment upon the work of other men? In my

opinion he may, provided he make no attempt to conceal his identity.

'Now it is foolish of Mr. Caine to insinuate that there was any difficulty in discovering who was the writer of the *Manchester Guardian* notices of his plays. If I had wished to hide my authorship of the articles, I should not have gone to the trouble of signing them with my initials. Moreover, it seems to me that what the *Manchester Guardian* said about Mr. Caine's play and my own is quite beside the point. I do not agree with him that the notice of my play was "almost entirely eulogistic," though there is little doubt that the notice of his play was "wholly condemnatory," as he puts it. But is it quite inconceivable that some one should have written a better play than Mr. Caine, for once in a way?

'It will be found, I dare assert, that most of both the dramatic criticisms and novel reviews appearing in the better sort of journal in this country are written by people who write books and plays themselves. Any man is justified in taking the view that this is not right. But it is in my mind that Mr. Hall Caine, when adversely criticised in the *Times* two or three years ago, referred to Mr. A. B. Walkley in a pungent phrase which left no doubt of his contempt for the opinions of a critic who was not a creative artist as well. Now, Mr. Caine objects to being criticised by me because I do write plays. He cannot have it both ways; a critic must either have or have not written a play. The only inference one can draw

from these two public pronouncements is that Mr. Caine objects to criticism of any sort, like the famous actress who said that gross flattery was quite good enough for her.

'That one playwright should write about the work of another is not the same as that a doctor or a barrister should write about another of his profession. The cases are not analogous. Doctors and barristers —unlike Mr. Hall Caine and myself—are not permitted to advertise themselves.

'Let us hope that we shall both do well out of the present correspondence.—Yours, etc.,

'STANLEY HOUGHTON.'

Mr. Caine did not reply.

It has been said that as a critic Houghton was unduly severe. His remarks about *The Night of the Party* drew a protest from Mr. Weedon Grossmith, but careful reference to his criticisms in general fails to disclose evidence to sustain the charge. The strongest sentences one is able to find—in each case, as it happens, written of novels—are (1) 'to like this novel much one would have to mistake stupidity for chivalry, and to be interested in women with big innocent eyes and brains like rabbits'; and (2) 'a piece of shameless sentimentality. It is a congregation of all the tricks that ever were for creating the amiable impression that the reign of King George III. was an epoch of sugar-icing, or if not *all* the tricks, at least the more obvious ones.' The fact is, he was

an absolutely sincere critic. Incompetence was abhorrent to his essentially tidy mind, and if he found incompetence allied with pretension he said hard things of it. He gave no quarter to a shoddy book or play by an author of reputation. Celebrities, who in his estimation did not deserve renown, were treated with the same candour as aspiring nonentities, and in the columns of the *Manchester Guardian* the business manager does not intervene. On the other hand he could praise, and praised with generosity. A case in point is his criticism, here quoted entire, of *Romeo and Juliet*. Plainly, he went to see this performance by a touring company with expectations of a dull evening. He was pleasantly surprised, and said so with refreshing zeal:

'First let it be said that the performance of *Romeo and Juliet* given by Miss Glossop-Harris and Mr. Frank Cellier and their company last night was no ordinary one. After an uncertain beginning, a rather sketchy brawl in the public place at Verona, and an unsatisfying festivity at Capulet's, it found itself in the orchard scene; and thence the tragedy marched forward with ever-growing intensity until it reached a fitting and noble climax in the monument. It has been said that it is the fate of English Romeos and Juliets to grow too old to look their parts before they have attained sufficient technical ability properly to play them. This company is young all through; the enthusiasm of unbruised youth with unstuff'd brain attacks this play of

burning youth and death-marked love, and each takes fire from the other. Crudely acted as it was in parts, inadequately (and often inappropriately) as it was staged, a genuinely tragic tide swelled up in the theatre and swept us away on its crest.

'Miss Glossop-Harris was the Juliet and Mr. Eugène Wellesley the Romeo ; and these two, if they did not bring to their physical fitness for their parts a perfect technical equipment, are at least practised actors, and possess a control over their emotions and temperaments that is quite sufficient for all practical purposes. The balcony scene was played charmingly, with the most engaging fragrance and simplicity ; the blank verse was spoken not only as if it meant something, but as if the speakers were actually thinking about what it meant, not measuring off so many lengths of figured verbiage. Miss Harris was fresh and limpid as spring water, and Mr. Wellesley was really passionate and not sentimental. Later on both of these players gave ampler proofs of the variety and scope of their powers in more trying passages, and each touched a high level of austerity and spareness in the scene of the tomb.

'We are not accustomed to distribute indiscriminate or exaggerated praise, but it is really astonishing to find a company, unknown in Manchester and containing no eminent star actors, giving a better performance of *Romeo and Juliet* than any touring company has given here for years, we imagine. And the chief charm about the whole affair is a complete

absence of any sort of rhodomontade or "side." Mr. Cellier contents himself with Friar Lawrence, a part which he plays with dignity and discretion, and all the rest of the company, even the incompetents—and there are one or two—play into one another's hands unselfishly like a band of brothers. This afternoon the rarely acted *Love's Labour's Lost* is actually to be done.'

It was the same with novels, and, since two verdicts of some harshness have been quoted, it is but fair here to give at full length his view of two books which pleased him. Both are by authors whose reputations, at the time, were to make, and both found Houghton eager to exalt them:

'A Sea Story.—She rides amid the reefs and creeps into the curious corners of the sea. The crash and clatter of her whirring tackle strike the echoes from the crags and break the solemn silence of the shoals. In her harsh grasp she grips the wreck and plucks it from destruction, hurrying about her frenzied task at all hours and in all weathers. The steam hisses and splutters in the bitter night under the flash of her humming blue arcs, and in the hot August afternoon the sea-water gurgles and belches through her armoured hose. A queer craft, this salvage ship, a queer craft from truck to keel; with a queer crew—always working furiously—amid the chaos of their floating factory. And Mr. Maurice Drake, in this

new novel of his, with the sombre title of *Wrack*, gives us an extraordinary impression of the craft and the crew. The salving of the Masai, and later on the voyage of the Thames-to-Tyne collier, are passages of almost sensationally vivid description. Mr. Drake does not ransack the ends of the earth in his quest of the romantic ; he finds adventure no further away than a reef off the Longships, he finds beauty in the Thames lights seen from the deck of a grimy coal-carrier.

'About a third of the way through the book we caught the flick of a petticoat. "Shameless Mr. Drake!" we cried. "Are you going to spoil a fascinating account of something you know intimately by weak-kneed concession to the sentimentalists?" Never did we make a greater mistake. The flick of the petticoat gave the story a twist that transformed it magically from a mere absorbing description into something very much finer. Mr. Drake is not of set purpose a moralist ; he is a novelist, as Ibsen was a dramatist, first of all ; but all fine work is profoundly moral, and *Wrack* is even terrifyingly moral. We wish we could say, too, that Mr. Drake is not a politician. He has a grievance—the practical disfranchisement of sailors and the consequent neglect of their interests by governments—and he has not been able to keep this King Charles's head out of his story. We cannot blame him for wishing to voice a complaint for which there are no doubt just grounds, but we cannot quite forgive him for allowing his

grievance to make a fine and splendidly true novel ring just a little false in the final chapters.'

'The True and the Strange.—An admirable novel, from which one has had no ordinary amount of pleasure, is *The Bracknels*, by Forrest Reid. It is called a 'family chronicle,' and perhaps it is a pity thus to label any story on the title-page. In the first place the description is not a distinctive one nowadays, when the family with its various constituents packed neatly together like specimens in a case is a favourite and fruitful subject for study; and in the second place, in family novels it is not the chronicle of events that interest us, but the delving underneath the top crust of events, and the demonstration of secret reasons and of hidden consequences. *The Bracknels* is full of the relationships between people so closely packed together, as it were, as to be constantly treading on each other's toes and digging each other in the ribs. It is full of those curious little episodes that don't lead anywhere, and that are yet so illuminating; episodes strange, not obvious and most natural. Again and again you are struck by the rightness of things done in ticklish situations; and always you recognise that the way out, though not foreseen, is entirely appropriate, and the recognition causes a glow of pleasure. It is like continually testing silver pieces and finding them all ring true. In the authenticity and discrimination of its incident *The Bracknels* reminds us of Mr.

Forster's *Howards End*; and like that fascinating book its first half is concerned principally with embarrassments, refinements of character, and niceties of conduct, and in the second half it breaks out a trifle, or runs a little wild. But, in truth, we must not forget that queer things come to pass under family roofs as well as on romantic coasts; nor that by placid firesides apparently composed breasts do sometimes seethe.

'One has tried to make it clear that even if the story were nothing more than a chronicle of small beer it would still be excellent, but some full-blooded people find that a mosaic of the bits of daily life does not satisfy their voracious appetites. They call such composition grey, even though underneath the ashes passion is glowing like a red ember; so it is well there is something more to be said. Standing out against the background of mosaic (which has been done well many times before) is a character that has hardly been done at all before, though one recalls a hint or sketch of such a character in a short story, curiously enough, again by Mr. Forster. That character is the boy Denis, whom the doctor calls a "psychological conundrum," and whom the other Bracknels with more or less understanding dub "queer" and "mad." On Sabbaths he sits in the Presbyterian pew, and on summer midnights he satisfies his soul with pagan rites at an altar in a hawthorn grove, his body bared to the whiteness of the moon. No attempt is made to explain the phenomenon, and

you may, if you choose, accept it as a sort of case of religious atavism; or you may (since the supernatural things are shown, skilfully, only through the eyes of Denis himself) say simply that the lad is crazy, as the stupid Bracknels do. Anyhow, to our mind the author has drawn this charming unearthly boy with extraordinary sympathy and penetration, and in doing so has raised the book to a rarer level and touched it with a more beautiful strangeness.'

Nor did his appreciation end with the printed word. He sang everywhere the praises of a book he liked: he kept review copies on his shelves: he bought the author's later books. This is the place, perhaps, to instance further his practical generosity. In London, after his chance had come, he would continually cry in the market-place the merits of others of the 'Manchester School,' even in the ears of managements who had his own plays under consideration. People, too, who were trying their hands at writing got into the habit of sending him plays for criticism, which always was ungrudgingly and helpfully given. Once or twice he did more than criticise. Mr. C. A. Forrest, whom he then knew only as a fellow-member of a hockey club, wrote a fine one-act play entitled *The Shepherd*, and asked Houghton for his opinion. He got it and more; Houghton never rested till the play was accepted for production by both Miss Horniman and the Liverpool Repertory Theatre. Mr. Forrest's plays are good enough on their merits,

but at the beginning the best dramatic wine needs all the bush available, and Houghton was there to lend a helping hand. Similarly, later on, Mr. J. F. Haylock, a Manchester journalist, sent him a one-act play, which, very shortly, was to be seen as curtain-raiser to *Hindle Wakes* on tour.

The remainder of his work for the *Manchester Guardian* consisted of the articles, mostly character sketches, which are reprinted here. As a sidelight and a further proof of his habit of meaning what he said, it may be mentioned that, when success brought with it means, he purchased the Beerbohm caricature of Mr. Arnold Bennett, to which he alludes in 'Anniversaries and Old Letters.' The articles are not numerous, but one notes in Houghton, working through the simpler medium, an outlook more mature than that which found expression in his plays. His mind, unhampered by the limitations of the stage, here shot ahead; and it is upon these articles, considered in conjunction with the marked change which, in the last year of his life, took place in the man himself, that one bases with confidence the assertion that the unwritten plays of his future would have revealed a stronger purpose and a deeper vision.

The Plays

The plays are here arranged in two groups: (1) long plays and (2) one-act plays, the items of each group being placed chronologically. Before considering them individually, in order of writing, a few notes on

Houghton's procedure may be of interest, even if intending playwriters find information of no more practical assistance than would a cook the recipe 'First catch your hare, then cook it!' First, Houghton caught his idea, then came a period of incubation, during which a small notebook was carried for the jotting-down of constructive points and scraps of dialogue. The full scheme of *Hindle Wakes* was sketched on a few scattered papers of a penny notebook. From this stage his plays grew shapely in his mind, to emerge in the form of a complete scenario, with every character decided and each scene in outline to the last. There was, with Houghton, no ecstatic dashing at a play, directly from the coming of its subject to the first act, with the almost inevitable 'petering out' of material before reaching the third act. He knew the full course of his play before he wrote a line of dialogue. This is not to say that his periods of incubation were long. He was, on the contrary, an extremely rapid worker. The mere bulk of his work proves that, especially when his daily office hours and the various activities already recorded are remembered. Ideas, perhaps, came slowly to him. There were intervals between his plays when he felt that he had struck a barren patch. Minds, like fields, must lie fallow sometimes. But from the moment of deciding on his subject, progress was extraordinarily rapid. *The Younger Generation* was written in two months, *Hindle Wakes* in three.

From the scenario he wrote the dialogue, rarely rewriting, and never more than once. Down to 1911 he wrote by hand. His writing was small and neat, a spare workmanlike hand, free from flourishes, eminently legible. Later, he used a typewriter, typing the play from the scenario, correcting with a pen. It is remarkable that his few alterations were not improvements. They were, in fact, in the nature of concessions. The line, as written, would be the sincere result of authentic observation; the alteration a sop to the pit, a line to win a laugh. It is, naturally, in the earlier plays, written before he gained self-confidence, that this tendency appears more freely. But it is there, to some extent, throughout; the surrender of the artist, still distrustful of his powers, to the man who knew the theatre through and through and feared to aim 'above their heads.' This is not theorising elaborately to excuse the occasional cheapness of his dialogue: it is simple fact, demonstrable from the written manuscript where the original line is good and the revision is a cheapening.

In the autumn of 1907 Miss A. E. F. Horniman initiated at the Midland Theatre, Manchester, the first Repertory Company in Great Britain. By the spring of 1908 she had acquired the Gaiety Theatre, and established it upon the lines which made it famous. The plays, selected by Miss Horniman and produced with more than a touch of genius by Mr. Iden Payne, set up at once a new dramatic standard for the provinces. Plays of the class pre-

sented had, it is true, been seen locally, but they had rarely had a chance to show themselves for what they were. 'Intellectual' plays, sloppily produced by managements whose resources fail to square with their ambitions, are the dreariest mischances of the theatre. Miss Horniman changed all that, and, watching her early plays, Houghton discovered his medium with his opportunity. The melodramatic trend of his 'first period' was buried for ever. Henceforth, he wooed the Comic Muse.

His connection with the Gaiety Theatre, which was to close with its most popular success, began with the production on 2nd November 1908 of the one-act play *The Dear Departed* (April to May 1908). Originally, like his earlier work, the play was too long—it would have occupied forty-five minutes in action—and required pruning under strong managerial guidance. The programme of its first production, as curtain-raiser to *Widower's Houses*, bears an acknowledgment of indebtedness for an idea to a story of de Maupassant; but the subject is universal, and, later, the acknowledgment was omitted.

'These things,' wrote Mr. C. E. Montague, 'are a kind of dramatic common or open space. Every dramatist, new and old, has equal rights over them. What matters is the way the rights are used. And Mr. Houghton, in using them, shows a pretty turn of observation, a fresh, quick relish for the harsh humours of the situation; and also a capital sense of theatrical values in such cases as the comic effect of

the daughter and son-in-law visibly struggling with the supposed dead man's furniture, and of the small girl coming in and promptly cutting through the whole web of adult sophistry with the remark, " Then we *have* pinched it." '

Since its production *The Dear Departed* has been frequently played by Miss Horniman's company in Manchester and at the Coronet Theatre, London. It was translated into French as *Défunt Merry* in 1911 by Louis Pennequin, and acted in translation in Holland during the same year. From May 1913 to February 1914 it was acted at the Criterion Theatre.

The Dear Departed was followed in August 1909 by Houghton's first long play, *Independent Means* (October to December 1908), a work not wholly satisfying, showing as it proceeds a sort of galloping consumption of tissue and a reliance upon technique to pull matters through. The play finds a natural place in the present edition, both as the first full-length production, and as showing Houghton expressing in drama, though still fumblingly, the results of his inspired observation of suburban life. It reflects also, as already noted, his Clarion Club experience, but the wildest hater of propaganda in art could hardly call *Independent Means* didactic. One is chiefly interested in the technical side of the play. Just as Houghton sometimes a little underrated the intelligence of his audience, so at first he greatly overrated the difficulty of technique. In this play technique, which was to be his slave, became for once

his tyrant. His acting experience had taught him all there was to know, but he had still to learn how certainly his craft was mastered, how little cause he had to fear the bogey of technique. Meantime, in his uncertainty, he did it too much honour, and the last act of *Independent Means* is a case of technique and very little else. The play had several revivals at the Gaiety Theatre, and was toured in 1913-14 by Mr. Iden Payne's company. It has not been played in London.

Marriages in the Making (January to April 1909) is light comedy of slight texture, hardly living up to the promise of its first act, but thoroughly amusing to the end. Houghton's observation of the minor society of Cheshire was not so full as that of the 'Salchester' suburbs; his types here tend more to the purely conventional; but the dialogue is quite characteristic, and has the flavour of his individual style, not at its best, but already astringent, with lines in it which come like a blow in the face from wind-borne spray. This play has not been acted.

The Younger Generation (November and December 1909) was produced by Miss Horniman in November 1910, frequently revived by her, played in London under the management of Mr. Frederick Harrison at the Haymarket and Duke of York's theatres from November 1912 to March 1913, in America under Mr. Charles Frohman, and in the provinces under Mr. Iden Payne. It is, therefore, after *Hindle Wakes*, Houghton's most successful play. In form it is

wholly modern; in spirit perhaps a little out of date. Its form shows Houghton completely master of his craft, no longer to be terrified by technique, with his tyrant of *Independent Means* obediently his slave. It is compact, incisive, with every word of its entertaining dialogue precisely placed and nicely weighed to bring its meaning home. Its technical accomplishment astonished Mr. William Archer. 'Quite admirable,' he wrote in 1910, 'are the technical ease and finish which he displays in this very entertaining and apposite study of middle-class life in Lancashire. When Ibsen was asked how he set about making a play, he said that he took some real-life incident that had come within his ken, threw in a little poetry—and the thing was done. Mr. Stanley Houghton, having no leanings Ibsenwards, does not throw in any poetry. Not merely in expression, but in conception and structure as well, his play is a piece of very sober prose. . . . How is it, I often ask myself with astonishment, that so many young men in the provinces have suddenly awakened, as it were, to find themselves workmanlike, and even accomplished, playwrights? The reason is partly, no doubt, that the new generation has learnt what *not* to do; but it nevertheless remains astonishing that so many of them should have mastered, seemingly without effort, the difficult art of compressing their observations of life into the narrow dimensions of the theatre.'

The value of the treatment is in the veracious and

amusing social portraiture. But, though the portraiture is absolutely authentic and observed from identifiable originals, the attitudes of parents and children suggest, for 1910, a social backwater rather than the broad stream of life. It is not that Houghton chose, as a symbol of revolt, Arthur Kennion's drunkenness. His plea for the humanising influence of alcohol is as indubitably sincere as Mr. Chesterton's. It is, rather, that the battle here fought over again was fought, for most of us, at an earlier date; and it was in the eighteen-nineties rather than in the present century that, as Mr. Holbrook Jackson writes, 'Life-tasting was the fashion, and the rising generation felt as if it were stepping out of the cages of convention and custom into a wider freedom of tremendous possibilities.' The suggestion was made, satirically perhaps, that a truer picture of the 1910 attitudes would show us earnest youngsters at home, reading and discussing Nietzsche, rudely interrupted by the boring return of the parents bursting with hilarious reminiscences of Mr. George Robey from the local music-hall; but the fact remains that Houghton was an exact observer, and in this play recorded what, in his own immediate environment, he saw; and the narrower sort of Nonconformist, who perceives in the smaller varieties of wild oats only the manifestations of original sin, is extant in other places besides the suburbs of Manchester.

The Master of the House, written just after *The Younger Generation*, in December 1909, preceded it

in production in September 1910. As an experiment in the gruesome it is interesting, but not wholly successful, because—again to quote Mr. C. E. Montague—'one felt, or might feel, as if one climatic thrill had come, hesitated for a moment about its own finality, and then decided to go on and improve on itself—which it does, only that one has that sense of a slight check, an intermission and then a renewal of tension, and not a continuous cumulation of shiversome grimness.' It is, that is to say, a little faulty in technique. Houghton himself dissented, and rated this play high amongst his works, holding the acting responsible for the sense of check midway —a view to some extent confirmed by the play's superior effectiveness when, later on, the part of Fred Ovens was played, both in England and America, by Mr. Whitford Kane. A French translation of this play was made by M. Louis Pennequin.

Houghton records that his next play, a four-act 'light comedy,' really a farce, entitled *Ginger*, occupied him for the, in his case, unusually long time of ten months—from March to December 1910. It is a play for which he came to have a deep dislike, and, apart from his own view, is properly excluded from the present edition, for it is essentially a *pièce de théâtre*. Abundantly entertaining in action, as its production in 1913 by Mr. Esmé Percy proved, it is written with a single eye to theatrical effect, and has consequently no literary interest beyond showing once again how exactly fitted to the requirements of

the theatre was the Houghton dialogue, even when he was content to put his words into the mouths, for the most part, of stock characters. The play is in the atmosphere of Mr. Wells' *Kipps*: the scene is London, where at that time Houghton had not lived, and the aristocratic persons at any rate are not drawn from life. Ginger himself is a delight in the hands of an actor content to keep him within bounds—a universal type, vulgar, good-natured, a bounder with a heart of gold and an education picked up at the music-halls. The second act has an ingenious setting behind a stall at a bazaar, and the third is on the stage extravagantly funny. If the third act, exploring as it does the comic possibilities of kippers, is in one sense on a lower plane than the acrid comedy of *The Dear Departed*, in another what is lost in art is gained in geniality.

If 1910 was comparatively a barren year, 1911 was to make amends. In March he wrote *The Fifth Commandment*, a one-act play, which has not been performed in England, though it had in 1913 a run at the Little Theatre, Chicago. It was, as a matter of fact, accepted for production by Miss Horniman, but withdrawn at the author's request, because he had since written, in *The Perfect Cure*, a long play on the same subject. This use of a one-act play as a sort of studio-sketch for a future full-length version occurs also in the case of *Fancy Free* and *Partners*.

Fancy Free, also written in March 1911, holds a

curiously important place amongst Houghton's plays. It was first produced in Manchester by Mr. Iden Payne in November 1911, and fell flat, both with audience and Press. 'Except for a slight touch of jauntiness,' said the *Manchester Guardian* critic, 'which pervades the treatment, not very happily, the author gives us a rather cold, dry, impersonal representation of two men and two women morally not far removed from a state of canine promiscuity.' The play, however, was to survive its Manchester reception, and, by the accidental coincidence of its appearance at the Tivoli Music-hall on the night after the Stage Society's production of *Hindle Wakes*, played a great part in establishing Houghton's success. A man who could appeal to audiences so different as those of the Stage Society and the Tivoli Music-hall plainly had powers no longer to be ignored. To quote a critic of different opinion from that of the *Manchester Guardian*: 'It is,' said the *Evening Standard*, 'a little gem, and it has all the elfin grace, the elusiveness, the unexpected turnings of Oscar Wilde.' It is perhaps best to regard it as the brilliant indiscretion of a man not yet old enough to have outgrown a wish sometimes to *épater le bourgeois*. From February to June 1913 *Fancy Free* was the principal item in a triple bill which held the stage of the Princess' Theatre, New York.

Partners, the full-length version of *Fancy Free*, was written during May to September 1911. It has not been acted, and possibly, when it comes to be,

the last act will be found a little long. Here it appears without alteration.

Before completing *Partners* Houghton was already meditating *Hindle Wakes,* and, in sending *Partners* immediately on completion to a friend, wrote of his scheme for the new play as a settled thing. Not always did Houghton's titles, in the event so happily chosen, come so early to him. *Hindle Wakes* was, from the first line in the penny notebook, *Hindle Wakes.* Sometimes he had a long and anxious search for an apt title. *The Younger Generation,* for instance, gave him much trouble, and was finally used only by the courtesy of Miss Netta Syrett, who had written a one-act play of the same name.

Hindle Wakes was written in the October, November, and December of 1911, and completed well before the Christmas of that year. It was offered to Miss Horniman, and at once accepted for production in Manchester during the following autumn. Meantime, Houghton was content to wait, but he offered the play rather casually to at least one London manager, who declined it on the grounds, just enough, that he could not hope to cast it properly in London. It is also worth mentioning that *Hindle Wakes* was offered to the Liverpool Repertory Theatre, and, though recommended for production by their then adviser, Mr. Lascelles Abercrombie, declined as being too strong meat for the Liverpool public. In June 1912, however, Miss Horniman's company was giving a repertoire season at the Coronet Theatre, and she

was asked by the Stage Society to provide the last production of their thirteenth season, the play to be new and preferably Lancashire. *Hindle Wakes* was the obvious choice. Its production took place at the Aldwych Theatre on 16th June 1912: it was produced by Mr. Lewis Casson, Miss Horniman's then director, who found in realistic plays the best expression of his art, and acted by that wonderful 'Miss Horniman's company,' which, as a result of its success in this play, was shortly to suffer severe loss, in some cases temporary, in *personnel*. Never, perhaps, have the dramatic critics lavished upon a new man's play such praise as they bestowed on *Hindle Wakes*, and it was plain that the matter could not rest with the two performances before the Stage Society. Mr. Cyril Maude offered a home at the Playhouse, and there, through a desperately hot summer, *Hindle Wakes* was played until in September Mr. Maude required the Playhouse for himself, and the run was concluded, to houses increasingly crowded, at the Court Theatre. In Manchester, where it was played in November 1912, its success was immediate, and new box-office records were set up at the Gaiety Theatre. The subsequent career was exceptional: through 1913 five companies played *Hindle Wakes* in the provinces, breaking records at many theatres in Lancashire and Yorkshire. In December 1912 it was produced by Mr. William Brady at the Maxine Elliott Theatre, New York, where, in spite of the acting of Mr. Herbert

Lomas as Nathaniel Jeffcote, an otherwise ill-chosen cast was responsible for its failure. In February 1913, however, with a reconstructed cast, still including Mr. Lomas, it proved so successful at the small Fine Arts Theatre, Chicago, that it was transferred for an extended run to a large theatre, the Olympic. The total number of performances from its first production to the time of Houghton's death is 1838. Recent developments include arrangements for its production in South Africa and Egypt and at Copenhagen.

Eulogy makes dull reading. It is sufficient here to repeat that the London Press rang with praise, not only after the Stage Society's production, but again upon the reappearance at the Playhouse when the interval of a few weeks might have afforded opportunity for second thoughts. While, however, nobody denied the brilliantly entertaining qualities of the play, its critical reception in the city for which it was written was comparatively cold. Houghton himself welcomed the change. He was, then as always, an excellent critic of himself, and was secretly more amused than deluded by the deluge of London's praise. That he had written a play which entertained was all he asked to know. He would agree that 'every one of the characters is a piece of authentic life,' but would smile to be told by Mr. J. T. Grein that 'it is of value in these days of the battle of the sexes. It heralds the movement of the future.' He had no ambition to be a 'revolutionary,' a 'daring

thinker,' and the like. But the pendulum in Manchester swung back too far. True, as a picture of manners, the play could hardly astonish there as in London. That the manners were veracious was taken for granted. Manchester trusted Houghton for that, merely confirmed its belief, and passed on to consider what after all came second in the play. The masterly first act was left alone. The thunderstorm, perhaps, was enigmatic. Enigmatic it remains. Houghton knew the theatre too well not to be aware that stage-thunder is always thunder of the stage, and as a symbol the storm is too crude to be acceptable. Then, there was no baby, which was held to be cowardly. Then, the play broke down in the second act, whereas in truth the play escapes breakdown. The squeak, by reason of the disappointing Alan-Beatrice scene, is narrow, but there is no breaking down. Then, Fanny is a point of view and not a human being—which is a criticism only those ignorant of the economically independent mill-girl could pass. Then, the people not only spoke Lancashire and (which was admirable) thought it, but (which was culpable) spoke their thoughts aloud. There is truth in this last point, but the thing was probably deliberate and is certainly defensible. Without here entering upon a discussion of the limitations of realism, this much may be argued as a point of technique. The soliloquy is inadmissible in realistic plays, and the soliloquy, wrongly employed in its simpler form merely to carry on the action, was

rightly used by the older dramatists as a vehicle for philosophy and psychology. Most of Shakespeare's philosophy occurs in the soliloquies. Houghton wanted to reveal motive, to get a little more beneath the surface than was possible through superficial realistic dialogue. This 'thinking aloud' seems a considered attempt to embody in dialogue the uses of soliloquy. If one speaker shows to another more of his mind than, naturalistically considered, is wholly probable, the loss in absolute realism is compensated by the gain, not otherwise attainable, in clarifying for an audience the motives of the characters. Realism is in any case a compromise. The point for the dramatist to ask himself is not 'exactly how in these circumstances will such a character naturally speak?' but 'how must I make him speak in order to convey to an audience both his meaning and his motive?' If the audience is to share the dramatist's psychological vision of his characters, this 'thinking aloud' is essential. It is a virtue, not a blemish, in the play.

Hindle Wakes is the result of absolutely sincere observation. There occur in its original script none of those alterations for the worse to which, in other plays, reference has been made. It represents at his best a remarkable technical artist, not yet as highly sensitive as with years he would have been, but enormously sensitised, and a writer of dialogue unsurpassed in his generation. In the peculiar fitness which characterised its London production it owed, un-

doubtedly, a debt to its producer, Mr. Lewis Casson, and to the acting of Miss Horniman's company; but its signal success in the provinces not only shows those despised territories capable of appreciating a play which intrigued London's critics more than London's public, but demonstrates *Hindle Wakes*, in spite of the New York failure, a play which is absolutely 'actor-proof.'

After *Hindle Wakes* Houghton wrote in collaboration, as a kind of busman's holiday, a light farce, which has not been acted; and, for the first six months of 1912, took, partly deliberately, partly through ill-health, a complete rest from writing. After taking leave of the cotton trade he wrote, before quitting Manchester, a play in ten days. One is not certain that this play *The Perfect Cure* bears any manifest signs of hurry. With the knowledge that it was, in fact, so rapidly written, one can, no doubt, discover them; but when the impulse to write comes to a mind already excited by unusual events words pour out in a sudden spate, and delay is dangerous. In the event the fate of *The Perfect Cure* was disastrous. It was produced in June 1913 by Mr. Charles Hawtrey and withdrawn after four nights. With the exception of Mr. Hawtrey, Houghton considered it badly cast, and had a strong affection for the play, whose technical cleverness, if only in carrying through three acts with four characters, is considerable, and whose geniality is only to be compared with that of the third act of *Ginger*. The play

has toured the provinces under Mr. E. T. Heys as a subsidiary enterprise to the same manager's *Hindle Wakes* companies.

There remain to be noted three plays which Houghton wrote on commission for Mr. Arthur Bourchier. *Phipps* was written in September 1912, *Pearls* in October, and *Trust the People* between October and December. Of the two one-act plays it is enough to say that for plays written on commission there is but one standard for criticism, and that the success standard. *Phipps* was acted by Mr. Bourchier at the Garrick Theatre in November 1912, has been produced by Mr. Iden Payne in Chicago, and is to be given in New York; *Pearls*, which was designed expressly for the music-halls, was successfully acted by Mr. Bourchier and Miss Violet Vanbrugh at the Coliseum and other music-halls. Houghton made no higher claim for *Pearls* than that it met a case, but that it did successfully meet the case of the music-halls was distinctly a feather in his cap. Other dramatists have sometimes condescended to the music-halls, to find themselves rebuffed. Houghton adapted himself to their peculiar demand, and made a success.

Trust the People was produced at the Garrick Theatre on 6th February 1913, and ran for forty-four nights. Its failure was excused on the grounds of hurried writing. Mr. John Palmer, in his excellent book on *The Future of the Theatre*, has a slightly different theory. 'Mr. Stanley Houghton,' he writes,

'an amateur of the stage in Manchester (an amateur in the sense that Congreve was an amateur), wrote two plays already celebrated in the immediately recent history of the English theatre. These two plays were Mr. Houghton's sincere contributions to English drama—written without thought of the public.

'The next we heard of Mr. Houghton was that he had come to London, and that he was writing a play for Mr. Arthur Bourchier. He was no longer an amateur writing to please himself. He was a professional author writing for an audience at the Garrick Theatre. Mr. Houghton's new play contained everything the public is supposed to like. All the ingredients of a really popular play were handled with quite an astonishing neatness and dexterity. But in vain was the net spread. The public would not be caught. Mr. Houghton being a man of quick perception saw that it was a mistake to get into touch with the English public: that nothing pleases it so much as to be ignored. It was soon reported that he had gone away to Paris to forget what the English public was like.'

There is more to be said for this view than for the explanation that the play failed because it was rapidly written. Houghton spent as long over *Trust the People* as over *Hindle Wakes*, and longer by a month than over *The Younger Generation*. Nor did he, as with *The Perfect Cure*, blame the acting, which he thought good, and in the case of Mr. Bourchier

superlatively good. He blamed the play. The simple fact is that *Trust the People* is a sick man's work. Long before production Houghton had discounted it, and one is only following his own desires in excluding the play from the present edition. 'The platitudes of depreciation,' wrote Mr. Monkhouse, 'were inevitable, but nobody who knew Houghton had any fear that he was at the end of the tether, or near it. He was neither overcome nor soured, and if his prospects were momentarily overclouded, he had yet an abundance of present accomplishment and fine prospects.'

Writing of Houghton's plays in the *British Review* Mr. Edward Storer said: 'Even the most irresponsible of them has a definite intellectual notion entangled in it somewhere. There is the presentment of an awakened intelligence behind all this rough movement of ugly middle-class Lancashire life, a curiosity, a sense of youth. . . . In vigour of plot and action he is quite the equal of many older English playwrights whom it would be indiscreet to mention. It will be very interesting to see what this playwright will do when he comes to town, so to speak. In one sense he has, of course, already come to town, but so far he has not given us a play which shows that he is capable of an artistic representation of metropolitan life as rounded as he has given us in the dramas of the fertile but savage North.'

In Mr. Storer's sense Houghton was not come to town, and one doubts if he ever wished to come.

He glanced at London, and went to live in Paris. Certainly he had no immediate intention of representing 'metropolitan life.' The novel he had begun was about Manchester. He made in Paris notes of two plays, a country house comedy and a Lancashire play. Lancashire interested Houghton; London did not. He had, one feels perfectly certain, no wish to 'come to town,' but he had, beyond doubt, an unexpressed desire to do for Manchester what Mr. Arnold Bennett had done for the Potteries; and one hardly thinks Mr. Storer would deny that Mr. Bennett came to town.

The word 'genius' was freely used of Houghton even in organs of opinions so opposite as the *Times* and the *English Review*. Let it be here admitted that genius is of two kinds. There is the heaven-born genius, leaping almost at once to full maturity, finding its commonest expression in lyric poetry; and the self-made genius, for whom was invented the tag about 'an infinite capacity for taking pains.' Houghton's was genius in the making, not fully wrought to its finest point, but leaving behind it, far more than promise, achievement, of which Mr. E. A. Baughan could write, 'Houghton's technique is superior to Pinero's,' and Mr. Storer could sum up by saying, 'He has, first of all, the dramatist's mind. He is more concerned with the action of his play than with anything else, and that is the great thing.'

Houghton was a first-rate technical artist, which may be a smaller thing than an intellectual or a

temperamental artist, but implies the complete mastery of the craftsmanship a man must have if he is to give full expression to the riper experience of his maturity, either on the intellectual or the temperamental plane. He had, behind acquired technique, the naturally 'seeing eye,' powers of clear observation, exceptional in themselves, trained by constant practice till they amounted to genius. An observer selects. When Mr. Archer wrote of *The Younger Generation* that Houghton 'does not throw in any poetry,' he stated of that play what is universally true of Houghton's dramatic work. He observed life from the comic writer's point of view, which is not the poet's. For his art not the beauty of life, but the absurdities and hypocrisies of daily existence, were the targets of his aim. His art needs no apology, but the humane beauty of certain of the *Manchester Guardian* sketches had yet found no expression in the plays. That with time it would have come is not to be questioned.

HAROLD BRIGHOUSE.

PLAYS

INDEPENDENT MEANS

A COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS

CHARACTERS

John Craven Forsyth (*a Gentleman*).

Mrs. Forsyth (*his Wife*).

Edgar Forsyth (*their Son*).

Sidney Forsyth (*Edgar's Wife*).

Samuel Ritchie (*a Motor-car Dealer*).

Jane Gregory (*a Servant*).

TIME.—*The present.*

SCENE.—*The large provincial town of Salchester.*

ACT I.—*Morning-room at Brook Bank, residence of* JOHN CRAVEN FORSYTH, Esq.

(*Twelve months pass.*)

ACT II.—*The same as* ACT I.

(*Three months pass.*)

ACT III.—*The same as* ACT I.

(*Three months pass.*)

ACT IV.—*Office at* SAMUEL RITCHIE'S *Motor Depôt.*

INDEPENDENT MEANS

ACT I

SCENE.—'*Brook Bank*,' *the residence of* JOHN CRAVEN FORSYTH, *is a large house situated in its own grounds in a suburb of the northern city of Salchester. The morning-room is a pleasant apartment, handsomely and tastefully furnished. Facing the spectator, but a little to the left, is a corner of the room, and from this corner two walls slope obliquely; the left wall being shorter than the right. In the middle of this left wall is the door, with a cabinet containing spirits and cigars near by. The French window, heavily curtained, is in the right-hand wall, quite near the corner mentioned previously; and also in this right-hand wall, but lower down, is the fireplace, in which a bright fire is blazing. A couple of arm-chairs flank the hearth; and a large round table, with chairs by it, occupies the centre of the room. A settee is against the left wall, below the door. A chair stands by the window. The room contains other unessential furniture, as well as books, pictures, and flowers, and looks cheerful and inviting. The electric lights are turned on, it being about half-past six on a cool spring evening.*

The door is opened by JANE GREGORY, *and* MRS. FORSYTH, *wearing a hat and gloves, comes in.* MRS. FORSYTH *is a charming, well-preserved woman of forty-five. Her sweet temper and her sense of class enable her*

to face all sorts of persons and events kindly and equably. JANE GREGORY *is a stolid, old-fashioned woman of about fifty. Originally nurse in the Forsyth family, she has taken root and stayed on as right-hand retainer of* MRS. FORSYTH, *who chooses to attend personally to the management of her house, with* JANE'S *assistance.*

MRS. F. Is your master in ?

JANE. No, ma'am ; he 's been out since lunch.

MRS. F. Nobody called ?

JANE. No, ma'am.

MRS. F. Any letters for me ?

JANE. Only a telegram. I 'll bring it, ma'am.

(JANE *goes out and* MRS. FORSYTH *sinks into an easy chair by the fire, stripping off her gloves.* JANE *re-enters with the telegram on a salver.*)

MRS. F. Thank you, Jane ; when did this come ?

JANE. Let me see. Why, it came almost the minute you 'd gone out.

MRS. F. (*tearing open the envelope and glancing at the telegram*). Good gracious, it 's from Mr. Edgar and Miss Sidney.

JANE (*grinning benevolently*). ' Miss Sidney,' ma'am ?

MRS. F. Yes. (*Then laughing merrily.*) Of course, I can't forget she isn't ' Miss Sidney ' any longer. I mean Mr. and Mrs. Edgar.

JANE. Surely now there 's nothing wrong, ma'am ?

MRS. F. Oh no. They 're coming back to-night, though.

JANE. To-night !

MRS. F. You must see about a room at once.

JANE. Master Edgar's old room ?

MRS. F. (*hesitating*). No, I think not. Give them the room over the library.

JANE. Very well, ma'am.

MRS. F. You 'll have to be quick; they expect to arrive soon, before seven. (*Glancing at the clock.*) Dear me, it 's too late to send the car to the station.

JANE (*weightily*). We 'd better keep dinner back half an hour, don't you think, ma'am ?

MRS. F. Yes ; do, Jane.

(*There is a ring at the front-door bell.*)

JANE. That 'll be the master now, ma'am.

(JANE *goes out and* MRS. FORSYTH *unpins her hat and takes it off.*)

(*Very soon the door opens and* JOHN CRAVEN FORSYTH *enters the room. He wears an easy, well-fitting lounge suit. He is a plump, polished, rather cynical man of about fifty, with hair getting thin on the top, a waxed moustache, and a full complexion. He takes a cigar from his lips as he enters.*)

FORSYTH. Ah, Mary. Just got back ?

(*The remark does not elicit a response, and* FORSYTH *does not seem to expect one. He continues speaking.*)

I may smoke here ?

MRS. F. Oh, of course. (*A slight pause ; and then she holds out the telegram without looking at him.*) You had better look at this.

FORSYTH (*taking the telegram*). Thanks. A telegram ? (*He glances through it.*) Hallo ! H'm ! Coming back to-night, eh ? (*Evidently surprised, he looks at his wife, who is gazing into the fire.*) Rather short notice.

MRS. F. The wire came early this afternoon. I 've only just opened it.

FORSYTH. Ah !

(FORSYTH *sits down; it is evident that both are rather troubled about the unexpected return, but neither is accustomed to show a trace of feeling in the presence of the other. The fact is, both care very much for their only son, but any affection for one another that may have existed has long since given place to scrupulous politeness.*)

By the way, Ritchie 's coming to dine to-night.

MRS. F. I 'm very glad.

FORSYTH. Been playing bridge with him at the club this afternoon. Thought he 'd liven us up a bit.

MRS. F. It *has* been quiet since Edgar's wedding, hasn't it ?

FORSYTH. Distinctly. (*A pause.*) I don't quite understand this telegram.

MRS. F. Nor I. They were to return a week to-morrow.

FORSYTH. You don't think anything 's happened ?

MRS. F. I don't know what to think. To come back before the honeymoon is over. (*Rising uneasily.*) Oh, Jack, there can't be anything wrong, surely ?

FORSYTH. I shouldn't be uneasy. Things won't always run smoothly with them, of course; but six weeks after marriage ! That 's too soon to anticipate trouble.

(*There is a slight pause, broken by a loud ring at the front door.* MRS. FORSYTH *rises quickly from her chair.*)

MRS. F. Oh, there they are, there they are. (*She hurries to the door and flings it open as* JANE *passes on her way to the front door.*)

MRS. F. Jane, is it Mr. Edgar ?

JANE (*disappearing*). I expect so, ma'am.

(MRS. FORSYTH *remains in the open doorway until the front door is opened and voices are heard greeting* JANE.)

MRS. F. Yes.

(*She disappears into the hall.* FORSYTH *smiles indulgently; and, being unaccustomed to make an exhibition of his feelings even to himself, he merely strolls up to the doorway.*)

MRS. F. (*outside*). Edgar !

EDGAR (*outside*). Well, mother.

MRS. F. (*outside*). And, Sidney, my dear. You are both well ?

EDGAR (*outside*). Both doing splendidly. Here, Jane, hang this coat up somewhere, will you ?

(EDGAR *appears in the doorway. He is a pleasant, well-made, fair, clean-shaven young fellow of about twenty-five. His manner is boyish and engaging.*)

Hello, father. Glad to see you again.

FORSYTH (*shaking hands warmly*). You 're looking very well.

(EDGAR *passes on to the fireplace and his place is taken by* SIDNEY. *She is a girl of about twenty-three, dark-haired, and not very tall. Her clear-cut, good-looking features are perhaps not quite handsome, but she is very attractive, and looks, in addition, capable and companionable.* MRS. FORSYTH *is following her.*)

(*Holding out his hands.*) Welcome, my dear Sidney.

(*Offering to kiss her.*) May I ?

SIDNEY. Yes, of course.

(FORSYTH *implants a delicate salute on her brow.*)

FORSYTH. You, too, are looking extremely well.

EDGAR (*warming himself*). Phew! It 's cold outside.

MRS. F. I 'm sure it is. Sidney, come and get warm.

(*Slipping her arm through* SIDNEY'S, *she leads her to the big arm-chair and sits facing her in the smaller one.* EDGAR *stands above the mantelpiece.* FORSYTH *prowls round the room, smoking his cigar.*)

EDGAR. I say, it was too bad not to send Benson to meet us at the station. Didn't you get my wire ?

MRS. F. Only a few minutes since, dear.

EDGAR. We took a hansom up and left the luggage.

MRS. F. Benson shall go at once for it. (*To* FORSYTH.) Will you ring ?

FORSYTH. Certainly. (*He does so.*) Well, and what sort of a time have you had ?

EDGAR. Oh, we 'd a decent time ; eh, Sidney ?

SIDNEY. Yes. Quite a decent time.

FORSYTH (*looking at them*). H'm !

(*There is a slight pause—then* JANE *enters.*)

EDGAR. And here 's old Jane, again. So you 've not got married while we 've been away, Jane ?

JANE. No, Master Edgar. I 'm too comfortable here. Besides, nobody 's asked me.

EDGAR. Wait till that rich old uncle of yours dies in Australia.

JANE. I don't think he ever will, sir. You rang, ma'am ?

MRS. F. Yes. Mr. Edgar's luggage is at the station. Will you tell Benson to go for it ?

JANE. Very well, ma'am. (JANE *withdraws.*)

MRS. F. Jane is glad to see you back, I can tell you. She was Edgar's nurse, you know, Sidney. She has adored him for twenty-five years.

SIDNEY. That 's a long time for a woman to worship a man.

MRS. F. When they 're not husband and wife, perhaps.

FORSYTH. It 's a long time even then.

MRS. F. Nonsense. We mustn't listen to your father, children. He 's a confirmed cynic.

FORSYTH. Cynicism is merely the result of profound observation of the world.

MRS. F. Not at all. It is only the cheapest form of wit.

FORSYTH. Thank you. (*He bows ironically.*)

SIDNEY. I hope we haven't inconvenienced you by turning up so suddenly. You must have been surprised when you got our telegram.

MRS. F. Of course, we hadn't expected you just yet.

SIDNEY. We only decided this morning.

MRS. F. You didn't care for Rossmullion ?

SIDNEY. It 's a beautiful place, of course.

EDGAR. It 's a beastly hole.

MRS. F. Oh !

FORSYTH. I find it difficult to get a distinct impression of the place from your descriptions.

EDGAR. Well, I suppose it is a beautiful place for those who like it. Sidney is fond of tramping about on the tops of mountains, but I think that 's a vastly overrated sport. Newspapers a day old and absolutely no one to talk to.

FORSYTH. H'm.

EDGAR. Except Sidney, of course.

FORSYTH. It appears to be an eminently suitable spot for a honeymoon, however. No distractions, absolutely nothing happening.

EDGAR. Oh yes, it rained frequently.

MRS. F. But what did you do ?

EDGAR. Before lunch we usually went out and walked about on mountain-tops till we were wet through, and then we returned home and changed.

FORSYTH. And after lunch ?

EDGAR. We repeated the same process.

SIDNEY. It 's too bad ! You liked Rossmullion very much at first.

EDGAR. I know I 'm talking rot, to a great extent, but you can't deny that it got awfully dull. I could have put up with the daily soaking if there had only been a music-hall within a hundred miles. It was the evenings that were the worst.

MRS. F. But why on earth didn't you leave Rossmullion and go to—well—to——

FORSYTH. Go to somewhere civilised ?

EDGAR. I thought of it. I suggested slipping across to the South of France, but Sidney wanted to stay where she was.

SIDNEY. We couldn't decide, so we arranged to toss up. If I won we were to stay at Rossmullion ; if Edgar won we were to go to the Riviera.

MRS. F. Good gracious !

EDGAR. Quaint idea, wasn't it ?

FORSYTH. And—— ?

SIDNEY. I won.

FORSYTH. So you—er—you came home !

EDGAR (*after a pause*). Well, I had to put my foot down. I couldn't stick it at any price.

SIDNEY. So we came home.

MRS. F. A capital idea. Home was the very best place to come to.

EDGAR. It 's stopped raining, at any rate.

MRS. F. Only you 've turned up before your house is ready. However, I daresay Sidney won't be sorry to have a hand in the final arrangements.

SIDNEY. No, I shan't. I shall be jolly glad.

MRS. F. We 'll thoroughly enjoy ourselves to-morrow. (*She rises.*)

FORSYTH. You 'll thoroughly tire yourselves out to-morrow.

MRS. F. It 's the same thing, sometimes. Now, my dear, shall I take you to your room ?

SIDNEY. Yes. (*Rising.*) Thank you.

MRS. F. Dinner is later to-night. (*To* FORSYTH.) You have plenty of time to dress.

EDGAR. Oh, let us off to-night. I 'm too lazy.

MRS. F. But we have a guest.

EDGAR. I don't care if you 've twenty. Who is it ?

MRS. F. Mr. Ritchie.

EDGAR. Old Ritchie ! That 's all right. He won't mind.

SIDNEY. We haven't any clothes until the luggage comes.

MRS. F. Of course not. Well then, you and I and Edgar won't trouble to-night.

(MRS. FORSYTH *and* SIDNEY *go out.* FORSYTH *goes up to the cigar and spirit cabinet and brings a decanter of whisky, a syphon of soda water, and a tumbler to the centre table.*

EDGAR *sits in the big arm-chair above the fireplace.*)

FORSYTH. Have a cigar ?

EDGAR. No, thanks. I have some cigarettes. (*He lights one.*)

FORSYTH (*mixing a whisky and soda*). How are you getting on ?

EDGAR. Oh, all right.

FORSYTH. I mean, with Sidney.

EDGAR. Yes, I know.

(*A slight pause.* FORSYTH *sips his whisky and strolls over to* EDGAR *with the glass in his hand.*)

FORSYTH. You know you made a big mistake.

EDGAR. Oh ?

FORSYTH. Well—an error of judgment. You should have insisted on going to France.

EDGAR (*quite pleasantly but firmly*). All right, dad.

FORSYTH. I 've lived longer in the world than you have, my boy, and I merely——

EDGAR (*briefly*). Yes, thanks very much.

(FORSYTH *looks at him comically and then goes back to the table with his glass.*)

I 'm glad old Ritchie is coming to-night.

FORSYTH. Yes, pleasant fellow, isn't he ? Your mother is very fond of him.

EDGAR. So am I.

FORSYTH. Sort of man who 's had a narrow escape of being a gentleman.

EDGAR. You mean because he sells motor-cars ?

FORSYTH. Not at all. Nowadays one hardly is a gentleman unless one sells something. What Ritchie lacks is the finish, the delicate, intan-

gible quality which is inherited and cannot be acquired.

EDGAR. Oh! I don't exactly know what you are getting at, but in my opinion the Rutland-Ritchie cars are the best on the market.

FORSYTH. They ought to be. They cost enough. But I was not thinking about Ritchie's motor-cars.

EDGAR. I know; but I was. I want to talk to old Ritchie about buying one.

FORSYTH. For yourself?

EDGAR. Yes.

FORSYTH. H'm. Do you think you can afford one?

EDGAR. I? Of course I can't. I want you to buy it for me.

FORSYTH. I see. (*He drinks.*) When you got married I provided you with a liberal allowance, I think?

EDGAR. Yes, I 've nothing to complain of there. But, you know, though it 's quite a decent amount to keep house on, it won't run to motor-cars.

FORSYTH. I don't suppose it will. And in those circumstances I would suggest that you try and manage without a new car just at present.

EDGAR. No, I can't do that. You know how keen I am on motors; they are about the only things in the world that I understand. I must have a car to mess about with.

FORSYTH. Well, I've got two; how many do you want?

EDGAR. I want one of my own.

FORSYTH. Your mother and I can manage with the landaulette: suppose I give you the De Dion? How will that suit you?

EDGAR (*doubtfully*). Thanks; it 's awfully good of

you. (*A pause.*) But you know the De Dion is three years old. (*He rises.*) To be frank with you, I 've set my heart on a new Rutland-Ritchie.

FORSYTH. Then, my dear boy, you 'll have to buy it yourself.

EDGAR. But I can't afford it.

FORSYTH. To be frank with *you*, Edgar, neither can I.

EDGAR (*after a pause*). I suppose that 's meant to be funny. If you don't intend to give me my car, you might say so right out, instead of raking up a ridiculous excuse like that.

FORSYTH. You flatter me; this is not one of my futile attempts at a joke. I am extremely serious just now. I really cannot afford to buy you a car.

EDGAR (*staring at him*). I 'm sorry, father; but it sounded so jolly thin. Why, I thought we 'd any amount of money.

FORSYTH. In this happy country of ours, the richer a man is the more difficult he finds it to make both ends meet. Money matters bore me exceedingly, and I leave them to my solicitors as much as possible. You will admit that up to the present I have never troubled you by talking business to you.

EDGAR. It wouldn't have been much good if you had.

FORSYTH. I didn't suppose so. Besides, I don't know very much about it myself. However, I had an interview with Norris recently, and he put the whole thing pretty plainly before me.

EDGAR. Anything serious ?

FORSYTH. Oh, dear, no. My income is derived from various investments, but mainly from shares in Wilkes and Grignall's Brewery, and Vandervelt's, the produce people.

EDGAR. Butter and beer. (*Grimacing.*)

FORSYTH. That 's nothing nowadays, it might have been slum property. Thank Heaven, our hands are clean at any rate. Beer is eminently respectable; I don't drink it myself; but I have no objection to it as an investment.

EDGAR. I suppose it pays well?

FORSYTH. It did. Wilkes and Grignall's used to pay ten per cent. regularly. But a few years ago they bought a lot of public-houses, and I imagine they gave too much for them, because they never paid more than five per cent. afterwards. Last year they reconstructed the board of directors, and since then they have paid nothing at all.

EDGAR. I say!

FORSYTH. It 's most unkind of Grignall, seeing that I was on his election committee. When I complained to him he attributed the bad trade to the growing consumption of German lager beer. He said that there ought to be a tariff put on it.

EDGAR. In my opinion it 's all owing to those bally Socialists.

FORSYTH. Very possibly. However, Wilkes and Grignall's have paid nothing this year, and if Vandervelt's hadn't been doing extra well, we should have been in rather a corner. Norris tells me that I have been spending every penny of my income, and just a bit over, for the last few years. However, there is no occasion for alarm. I must be careful for a time. I have already begun to retrench.

EDGAR. You have?

FORSYTH. Yes. I 've knocked off all my subscriptions to charities.

(MRS. FORSYTH *enters.*)

MRS. F. Mr. Ritchie hasn't come yet ?

FORSYTH. That reminds me. I must go and do him honour by getting into my evening clothes.

(*He finishes his whisky and strolls out of the room. The others do not speak until he has gone.* EDGAR *stands up when his* MOTHER *comes in.*)

EDGAR. Where 's Sidney ?

MRS. F. Sidney will be down soon.

EDGAR (*looking at himself in the glass*). I must run up and make myself respectable too.

(*He is still gazing into the mantel-glass.* MRS. FORSYTH *crosses to* EDGAR *and slips her arm in his. He turns and smiles at her and just kisses her brow very gently.*)

MRS. F. Well, Edgar ?

EDGAR. Well ?

MRS. F. Sit down and talk to me.

EDGAR. But isn't Sid coming ?

MRS. F. Does that matter ?

EDGAR. I thought you wanted to talk about her.

(MRS. FORSYTH *smiles and sits in the big arm-chair above the fire.* EDGAR *sits on the arm.*)

You never ask me about things, and yet you make me tell you, somehow. So different from father. He asks, but one doesn't tell him anything.

MRS. F. Oh, has he been—— ?

EDGAR. He tried to pump me about Sid just now, but I soon shut him up.

MRS. F. You shouldn't have discouraged him; he is so seldom interested in anything now.

EDGAR. And of course that Rossmullion business did sound rather quaint, didn't it ?

MRS. F. Well, a little bit.

EDGAR. In my opinion we ought to look at life philosophically.

MRS. F. Indeed !

EDGAR. For instance, it 's no good pretending that marriage is the end of everything. I used to think it was always a case of wedding-bells and live happy ever afterwards.

MRS. F. Ah, you always *were* too fond of the theatre.

EDGAR. Well, in my experience——

MRS. F. Your experience ! Oh, come, Edgar !

EDGAR. It 's only five weeks, but it *is* experience. In my experience marriage is the beginning of everything. It 's only after you 're married that you begin to find things out.

MRS. F. What sort of things ?

EDGAR. About your wife. (*A pause.*) And of course I 've no doubt she finds out things about you.

MRS. F. My dear boy, this finding out things is the secret of success in marriage. You have to find out each other's little fads and failings, and when you 've found them out you must respect them. You have to give and take, Edgar.

EDGAR. It 's easy enough to take, but when it comes to giving it 's another matter.

MRS. F. But it should not be difficult when you are fond of each other—and you *are* fond of Sidney ?

EDGAR (*earnestly*). Of course I am, mother.

MRS. F. Then nothing else matters.

(EDGAR *gets up and strolls about the room.*)

EDGAR. When we were engaged Sidney never used to talk politics.

MRS. F. And does she now ?

EDGAR. Yes.

MRS. F. That shows she is an intelligent woman. She will be able to help you when you get into the House of Commons. Didn't Mrs. Gladstone help her husband a good deal ?

EDGAR. Yes, but *she* agreed with Gladstone. Sidney doesn't agree with me.

MRS. F. Oh !

EDGAR. Not a bit. You know I 'm a staunch Conservative ; my father always has been, and so am I, naturally. Goodness only knows what Sid is.

MRS. F. Perhaps she takes after *her* father. When he died he was Editor of *Peace, Retrenchment, and Reform*, wasn't he ?

EDGAR. When a woman 's married she ought to cleave unto her husband.

MRS. F. It must be difficult for any sincere person to change sides all at once.

EDGAR. Then there 's another thing. I never knew she didn't care about going to church.

MRS. F. Doesn't she ?

EDGAR. No, she won't go to church at any price.

MRS. F. But you don't go either.

EDGAR. This is different. It looks so bad if a woman doesn't go to church. It didn't matter in Rossmullion, but here there are people to consider.

MRS. F. I think you are rather inconsistent. You object to her politics because she doesn't agree with you, and to her religion because she does.

EDGAR. Perhaps there 's something in what you say. (*Coming to her.*) You see I 've no fear about our not hitting it off in the end, because we 're really fond of each other, and——

(SIDNEY *enters.*)

Hello, Sid. We were just talking about you.

SIDNEY. Thought so. You look guilty. Go and make yourself clean for dinner.

EDGAR. Bother ! (*Crossing to the door.*) That was the one advantage of Rossmullion ; I could be as untidy as I liked, and there was no one to criticise me.

MRS. F. There was Sidney.

EDGAR. Sidney ! Oh, she was untidy too.

(*He goes out.*)

SIDNEY (*calling after him*). Oh, I was not. (*Laughing, she sits in the arm-chair* EDGAR *has vacated.*) What was Edgar telling you when I came in ?

MRS. F. He was just in the midst of telling me that you were extremely fond of each other.

SIDNEY (*pleased*). What a dear boy he is. (*She laughs.*) I think he 's tremendously young for his age.

MRS. F. It is a good fault. He 'll soon get over it.

SIDNEY. Oh, I wouldn't have him anything else for worlds. Do you know, I 'm going to tell you a secret about Edgar.

MRS. F. Yes ?

SIDNEY. He 's just beginning to find out that he doesn't understand me at all.

MRS. F. Indeed !

SIDNEY. We have different opinions about nearly

everything under the sun. Of course, I 've known it all the time, but he doesn't suspect it even yet.

MRS. F. But when he does find out ?

SIDNEY. Oh, by that time I shall have converted him to my views. A woman can always twist a man round her little finger. Isn't that so ?

MRS. F. It is the popular opinion. But doesn't it apply more particularly to the woman who uses her personal fascination to get a diamond necklace out of her husband ? Don't you think that an intellectual twisting can hardly be accomplished by exercising the charm of sex ?

SIDNEY. I shan't try to exercise that. It wouldn't be fair. No, I shall simply convince him by unanswerable arguments. It never struck me when we were engaged, but he really is terribly behind the times. I fancy it is the way he has been brought up. (*Then quickly.*) Oh, I 'm sorry, I didn't mean you and Mr. Forsyth. It is probably his public school and his university that are responsible.

MRS. F. Thank you, my dear. But I have no doubt that I *am* a little old-fashioned. However, I dare say I 'm not too old to learn, if you have anything worth teaching me.

SIDNEY. I say things without reflecting enough. But you know I didn't mean to hurt you—mother. May I call you mother now ?

MRS. F. I hope you will, dear, and I hope that I shall be able to take the place of the mother you have lost.

SIDNEY. If I can only be good enough to be your

daughter. (SIDNEY *sits on the arm of* MRS. FORSYTH'S *chair, and slips her arm round her neck.*)

MRS. F. (*stroking her hand*). I haven't any fear of that.

(JANE *enters, showing in* SAMUEL RITCHIE, *who is in evening clothes.*)

JANE. Mr. Ritchie! (JANE *goes out.*)

(RITCHIE *is a big, homely, undistinguished man, with a good-natured face, thick, curly, greyish hair, and a moustache. He can appreciate the good in everything. He enjoys* FORSYTH'S *company and mistrusts his nature. He admires* MRS. FORSYTH *from afar, and he is very fond of both* EDGAR *and* SIDNEY. *He even admits an amused partiality for* JANE.)

MRS. F. Good evening. So glad you could come. (*Shaking hands.*)

RITCHIE. I always come here when I get a chance. (*Seeing* SIDNEY.) Hello, hello! Mrs. Edgar! I didn't expect to see you.

SIDNEY. Aren't you pleased?

RITCHIE. I 'm always pleased to see you. (*Taking her hands.*) Let 's have a look at you. Ay, you 'll do.

SIDNEY. Thank you, I 'll tell Edgar you 're satisfied.

RITCHIE. But where is he? You 've not left him behind?

MRS. F. No; he 's here.

RITCHIE. Where?

SIDNEY. It sounds as if he 's coming downstairs now.

(*Certain bouncing sounds are heard, and* EDGAR *suddenly flings open the door and bounds in. He is in his shirt-sleeves.*)

EDGAR. I say, Sid, the luggage has come, and one of your trunks— (*Seeing* RITCHIE.) Hello, Ritchie, old chap, how d' ye do. (*He thumps* RITCHIE *on the back and grasps his hand.* RITCHIE *wrings it and smites* EDGAR *a genial blow on the chest.*)

RITCHIE. Let 's have a look at you. Ay, you 'll do too.

EDGAR. I should think so. Apologise for my shirt-sleeves; didn't know you were here.

SIDNEY. Edgar, what about my trunk ?

EDGAR. Yes, I forgot. One of your trunks has fallen off the car and the lid 's burst open.

SIDNEY. Oh, which one ? Has anything got spoilt ?

EDGAR. You 'd better go and see. It looks to me rather like a holy mess.

SIDNEY. Good gracious ! (*She runs out.*)

EDGAR. I say, Ritchie, she looks all right, eh ? I must go and help her.

RITCHIE. Here. What do you mean by turning up before we expected you ?

EDGAR. I don't know. We came home because it was raining. (*He runs out.*)

RITCHIE (*taking a seat*). Forsyth never told me they were here.

MRS. F. He didn't know.

RITCHIE (*surprised*). Didn't know ?

MRS. F. Er—no. (*He stares at her.*) They came back unexpectedly. (*A pause.*) Oh, of course you are surprised. So was I.

RITCHIE. What does Forsyth think ?

MRS. F. I haven't had an opportunity of speaking to him. We so rarely discuss anything together now.

RITCHIE. Then you 'll talk to me ?

MRS. F. You wish me to ?

RITCHIE. You 're dying to. Now, aren't you ?

MRS. F. You know how much I value your advice.

RITCHIE. You shall have it. Fire away.

MRS. F. Well ; to begin with, you never knew Sidney's father, did you ?

RITCHIE. No ; he was a bit of a crank, wasn't he ?

MRS. F. He was a distinguished literary man.

RITCHIE. Ay, same thing ; fire away.

MRS. F. He had peculiar views about women.

RITCHIE. Peculiar ?

MRS. F. Well, he was a latitudinarian.

RITCHIE. I 'm sorry to hear it.

MRS. F. No, no, no ! I mean he held wide, advanced opinions.

RITCHIE. Oh, my mistake. Sorry.

MRS. F. I am afraid his influence over Sidney has been considerable.

RITCHIE. But he 's dead now ?

MRS. F. Yes.

RITCHIE. Well, what more do you want ? She 'll forget all about his opinions fast enough.

MRS. F. After his death she came to Salchester to live with a relative, and Edgar met her only three months ago. You will remember how madly he fell in love with her.

RITCHIE. Shall I ever forget it ?

MRS. F. They had such a very short engagement. Three months is not very long for two persons to find out whether intellectually they are suited to spend a lifetime together.

RITCHIE. No. I imagine they hadn't much time to spare for thinking about that.

MRS. F. That is the mistake. They have begun to think about it now, and if they discover that they don't suit each other—it is too late.

RITCHIE. I see. You are afraid of the sort of thing that is described in the papers as 'incompatibility of temper.'

MRS. F. (*shuddering*). Don't call it that.

RITCHIE. I 'm sorry.

MRS. F. I know something about that.

(RITCHIE *does not answer her; turns away.*)

MRS. F. But Edgar's nature is so much sweeter than his father's.

RITCHIE. You see, Edgar takes after his mother.

(MRS. FORSYTH *smiles faintly.*)

(*Getting up.*) I 'm glad you 've told me this, because I can relieve your mind, and I can give you a bit of advice. First, remember they are only a couple of children; a squabble now and then will do them good, so long as there isn't any bitterness. And then, second, my bit of advice.

MRS. F. Yes.

RITCHIE. Don't meddle with them. Don't let them think you 're the interfering old mother-in-law—I beg your pardon—but you know what I mean?

MRS. F. Yes.

RITCHIE. They 've got to settle their mutual relations for themselves; you can't do it any more than you can have their teeth out for them.

MRS. F. (*taking his hand*). Thank you.

RITCHIE. That 's all right. I 've said all I wanted to say; now I 'm quite ready for dinner.

(FORSYTH *enters, dressed for dinner.*)

FORSYTH. Ah, Ritchie, you 've turned up. What 's that you were saying about dinner ?

RITCHIE. That I 'm quite ready for it.

FORSYTH. So am I. (*He goes to the table.*) Have a drink first ?

RITCHIE. No, thanks. I don't care for whisky before dinner.

FORSYTH. Don't you ? I like it whenever I can get it. Have some sherry then ?

RITCHIE. Nothing, thanks.

(*He sits again in the arm-chair, facing* MRS. FORSYTH, *who has also regained her seat.* FORSYTH *pours whisky into a tumbler, but adds no soda.*)

RITCHIE. By the way, Forsyth, have you heard about Vandervelt's ?

FORSYTH. Vandervelt's ?

RITCHIE. The Dutch produce people. Their agent in Holland has been arrested for embezzlement, and it appears they are very badly hit.

FORSYTH (*in a hard voice*). What 's that ?

RITCHIE. I hear that their losses are tremendous. You hold a few of their shares, don't you ?

FORSYTH. Yes, a few. (*He gulps down the neat whisky, facing the audience, not looking at the others, who are not observing him.* EDGAR *and* SIDNEY *burst into the room, arm-in-arm.*)

SIDNEY. Dinner 's ready.

EDGAR. Now then, mother. (*He takes her arm.*)

SIDNEY. Now, Mr. Ritchie. (*She leads him to the door.*)

RITCHIE. Dinner ready ! Hooray !

EDGAR. Come along, father.

FORSYTH (*still in the same place, not looking round*). Yes, I 'm coming.

(*The others go out.* FORSYTH *lifts the decanter and pours out some more whisky, and his hand trembles so that the decanter clatters against the rim of the tumbler.*)

The CURTAIN *falls slowly.*

ACT II

About a year has elapsed since the last Act; that is to say, it is again early spring. The scene is again the morning-room at Brook Bank; everything is practically unchanged, and lights and fire are burning briskly. Dinner has been finished quite recently.

MRS. FORSYTH *is sitting by the fire with a book. She is wearing evening dress.* JANE *comes in.*

JANE. Mr. Ritchie is in the drawing-room, ma'am.

MRS. F. Very well, Jane (*rising*); you may bring him here.

JANE. Yes, ma'am.

(JANE *goes out and* MRS. FORSYTH *crosses to the table and puts down her book.* JANE *returns, showing in* RITCHIE, *who is in evening clothes.*)

JANE. Mr. Ritchie. (JANE *goes out.*)

(RITCHIE *comes down on the left of the table and silently shakes hands with considerable emotion.* MRS. FORSYTH *smiles faintly.*)

RITCHIE. I got your letter.

MRS. F. I knew you would come. It is good of you.

RITCHIE. Not at all. Not at all. Upon my soul, I don't know what to say; I 'm so shocked.

MRS. F. Sit down, won't you? (*She sits on the settee and* RITCHIE *takes the chair on the left of the table.*)

RITCHIE. I understand from your letter that you are ruined, that poor Forsyth is practically bankrupt.

MRS. F. Yes.

RITCHIE. I couldn't have believed it possible, if you hadn't told me yourself.

MRS. F. No; I suppose it will be a surprise for Salchester—except, perhaps, for some of the tradespeople. It has become more and more difficult to pay their bills of late.

RITCHIE. Dear, dear!

MRS. F. We have been gradually drifting nearer and nearer the brink during the last twelve months. The crisis came this afternoon. Jack had an interview with his solicitor. We can't go on any longer.

RITCHIE. But what is the reason? How has it happened?

MRS. F. I can't tell you everything. But the two companies in which most of our money was invested went wrong, and we lost nearly all of it. Then Jack grew desperate, and determined to make an effort to do something himself.

RITCHIE. I suppose he speculated?

MRS. F. Yes.

RITCHIE. Ay, that 's the lazy man's idea of working.

MRS. F. Of course he made our position much worse. But I can't give you the details. Perhaps Jack will; I want you to have a talk with him. That 's why I sent for you.

RITCHIE. How 's he bearing it?

MRS. F. Not very well, I 'm afraid.

RITCHIE. I 've noticed a big change in him lately.

MRS. F. Yes.

(*There is a slight pause.*)

RITCHIE. And the children, Edgar and Sidney, how do they take it ?

MRS. F. They don't know yet.

RITCHIE (*sharply*). What !

MRS. F. I shall have to tell them to-night. Edgar telephoned to say they would be round after dinner.

RITCHIE. Do you mean to say that you 've had to bear all this alone ?

MRS. F. We kept it from them, hoping that things would improve. We held our heads above water as long as possible. I 'm almost glad the crash has come at last ; the struggle was nearly too much for me.

(RITCHIE *rises and goes up to the fire ;* MRS. FORSYTH *also rises.*)

I 'll see if Jack is at liberty. He is in the library. (*She goes to the door.*)

RITCHIE. If you think he 'd rather not be disturbed——

MRS. F. Oh no ! I want you to see him ; it will do him good.

(MRS. FORSYTH *is going, when the door opens and* EDGAR *enters in evening clothes.*)

EDGAR. Oh, here you are. Good evening, Ritchie. (*He kisses* MRS. FORSYTH *perfunctorily.*) Has Sid turned up yet ?

MRS. F. No. Why hasn't she come with you ?

EDGAR. She started first because she wanted to call at that confounded Mrs. Pangbourne's.

MRS. F. Mrs. Pangbourne ?

EDGAR. Yes. I hate the woman.

RITCHIE. What 's wrong with her ?

EDGAR. She 's a sort of suffragette. I 'm afraid Sid will get hold of some of her ideas.

MRS. F. I think Sidney has too much self-respect for that.

(MRS. FORSYTH *goes out.*)

EDGAR. Well, Ritchie, how 's the world using you ?

RITCHIE (*briefly*). All right.

EDGAR. I say, I shall be coming round after a car of yours one of these days.

RITCHIE. Will you ?

EDGAR. Yes. I 'm working father gradually. It 's a difficult process and requires a great deal of art.

RITCHIE. So I should imagine.

(MRS. FORSYTH *returns.*)

MRS. F. Jack will see you, now.

RITCHIE. Right. In the library ?

MRS. F. Yes. I 'll go with you.

(RITCHIE *and* MRS. FORSYTH *go out.*)

(EDGAR *sits at the table, and takes some motor-car catalogues from his pocket, and begins to study them.* JANE *enters with several letters on a salver.*)

JANE. I thought the mistress was here, Master Edgar. The post 's just come.

EDGAR. She 's in the library. Stay, Mr. Ritchie 's with her now. Leave them here.

JANE. Yes, Master Edgar.

(JANE *deposits the letters on the table and* EDGAR *examines them.* JANE *goes to the fireplace and attends to the fire.*)

EDGAR (*taking up an envelope with a halfpenny stamp*). What 's this thing ? Circular ? (*He pulls out a brightly-coloured printed paper.*) ' Women's Social and Political Union ! Salchester Branch.' Hello ! They 're going to hold a demonstration in Albert Park !

JANE. Goodness, Master Edgar, what will they do next?

EDGAR. Heaven knows ! Wear trousers, I expect.

JANE (*grinning broadly*). Oh, Master Edgar ! What things you do say ! (*She goes towards the door.*)

EDGAR (*looking at the other letters*). Here, stop a bit, Jane. There 's a letter for you.

JANE. For me, sir ?

EDGAR. Yes. London postmark.

JANE. I don't know any one in London. (*Taking it gingerly.*) Who can it be from ?

EDGAR. That admirer of yours. You see, it 's an offer, Jane.

JANE. Lor', Master Edgar, don't embarrass me so.

(JANE *goes out grinning, making way for* SIDNEY, *who enters at the same moment, in an evening frock.*)

SIDNEY. You 've got here first, then ?

EDGAR. Yes.

(SIDNEY *comes behind* EDGAR'S *chair, and he bends his head back and draws her face to his and kisses her. She playfully taps his cheek.*)

SIDNEY. Don't be silly.

EDGAR. How 's the Pangbourne woman ?

SIDNEY. Quite well.

EDGAR. When 's she going on the warpath again ?

SIDNEY. Very soon. Oh, she 's sent mother a circular, I see.

EDGAR. Fancy mother demonstrating with the shrieking sisterhood! Ha, ha! Into the fire with Adelaide. (*He crumples up the circular.*)

SIDNEY. Stop. I want you to read that.

EDGAR. I have read it. Grand procession and meeting in Albert Park, followed by squeals and hysteria.

SIDNEY. No. Read it carefully.

EDGAR. Why? (*Sobered by her glance, he unrolls the paper and looks at it.*)

SIDNEY. Look at the Committee.

EDGAR. 'Committee: Mrs. Atkinson, Miss Violet Bradshaw, Miss Emily Dennison (*his voice changes*), Mrs. Edgar Forsyth!' (*Jumping up.*) Sidney!

SIDNEY. Well?

EDGAR. How dare you?

SIDNEY. How dare I? (*She keeps her temper well in hand.*)

EDGAR. You 've no right to use my name.

SIDNEY. It 's not your name; it 's my name. It 's not my fault if the law insisted on my taking your name when I married.

EDGAR. I don't care; it compromises me.

SIDNEY. You ought to be very proud to be associated with the movement, even in such an indirect way.

EDGAR. It 's most humiliating; I shall be chaffed by every fellow I meet. I insist on all these bills being destroyed.

SIDNEY. They can't be. We sent out five thousand by this morning's post.

EDGAR (*raging about the room*). Oh! Five thousand of them!

SIDNEY. Now, Edgar dear, do listen to me quietly. I couldn't describe myself any other way.

EDGAR. Why should you want to describe yourself at all? How dare you join this beastly Committee?

SIDNEY. Don't go on asking me how I dare do things.

EDGAR. Why didn't you ask my permission to join these women?

SIDNEY. Because you wouldn't have given it.

EDGAR. That doesn't matter. You ought to have asked it.

SIDNEY. I entirely deny your right to forbid me to do anything whatever.

EDGAR. I have a right. The law gives it to me.

SIDNEY. A law made by men for men. Can you blame women for disregarding that or any other law, when they have had no hand in making it? (*She sits in arm-chair* L. *of fire.*)

EDGAR (*getting control of himself*). Look here, Sidney, I 'm not going to start a debate on this question.

SIDNEY. I 'm very glad. You know so little about it that I feel ashamed of taking advantage of you.

EDGAR. Sidney!

SIDNEY (*controlling herself*). I 'm sorry if I was rude; but we may as well have this out, and definitely fix our position towards each other. Do you remember when it all began?

EDGAR. No.

SIDNEY. Six months ago, when you forbade me to go and see a performance of 'Man and Superman.'

EDGAR. I was quite right. It 's not fit for any decent woman to see.

SIDNEY. Yet you offered to take me to the 'Merry Widow' instead.

EDGAR. 'Man and Superman' is by Bernard Shaw.

SIDNEY. Yes; that 's why I wanted to see it.

EDGAR. In your presence I won't say what I think of the man; but I 'd give something to meet him face to face.

SIDNEY. Well, after that we had the argument about going to church.

EDGAR. You were most unreasonable.

SIDNEY. I offered to go to church if you would. You refused.

EDGAR. A man can do things that a woman can't.

SIDNEY. Then he oughtn't to, that 's all. You hold the oriental view of women; you 'd like to have us all shut up in harems. You think that we 're soft, clinging creatures who only exist for your own delight. I can tell you that it is not my idea, nor the idea of any woman of spirit.

EDGAR. And it 's not mine either; you exaggerate frightfully. But I will say this, I do think that a woman's place is in the home.

SIDNEY. Scrubbing the floor, while the man sits drinking in the public-house. My dear Edgar, your ideas are a hundred years old.

EDGAR. I know I 'm a Conservative, if that 's what you mean. But I don't in the least object to giving the vote to women who are householders and who pay rates and taxes.

SIDNEY. Thank you. Everybody approves of that, but I notice we are no nearer getting it in spite of the general approval.

EDGAR. You must blame the disgraceful behaviour of the Suffragettes for that. They have shown that women are quite without any sense of responsibility.

SIDNEY. My goodness !

EDGAR. Now, my dear girl, do have a bit of common sense and give up this nonsense. What good will the vote do you ?

SIDNEY. What good does it do to the millions who have it now ? The vote is only a symbol; it stands for equality and freedom. While it is denied us we are on the level of felons and lunatics.

EDGAR. But you know that 's all rot. You are not equal and never will be. The man is stronger and more intelligent. It is his duty to go out into the world and provide a home for his wife and children.

SIDNEY. You ought to go and lecture to the Woman's Anti-Suffrage Society.

(MRS. FORSYTH *comes in. The relations of* EDGAR *and* SIDNEY *are obviously strained, and they do not speak as she looks from one to the other.*)

MRS. F. What is the matter ?

EDGAR. Sidney's going mad, that 's all.

MRS. F. Sidney ?

SIDNEY. Don't listen to him, mother; he is only talking nonsense. I want you to do me a great favour.

MRS. F. Anything in reason, my dear.

SIDNEY. There is going to be a big Woman's Suffrage Demonstration in Salchester. Will you lend us your name, and support us ?

EDGAR. That 's likely, isn't it ?

MRS. F. I 'm afraid it is impossible just now.

EDGAR. There you are.

SIDNEY. But listen, mother——

MRS. F. It is not that I haven't any sympathy, provided that everything is quite orderly and respectable, but at present it is out of the question.

SIDNEY. I wanted to persuade you to entertain the delegates, to hold a reception here at Brook Bank.

MRS. F. Even if Mr. Forsyth would allow such a thing, Sidney, it cannot be considered now. There can be no more entertaining at Brook Bank.

EDGAR. No more entertaining !

SIDNEY. Why not ?

MRS. F. I have to tell you something that perhaps you ought to have been prepared for long ago. We are no longer as well off as we were.

EDGAR. What do you mean ?

MRS. F. Some time ago we lost a great deal of our money——

EDGAR. Mother !

MRS. F. And since then your father has been speculating—he is completely ignorant of business—and the result is that we are—we are ruined.

EDGAR } (*together*). Ruined !
SIDNEY }

(*They stare at her in amazement.* FORSYTH, *much altered and looking very ill, enters with* RITCHIE. *Nothing is said.* SIDNEY *gazes at* FORSYTH *and then bursts into a hard, almost hysterical peal of laughter. They turn to her with slight exclamations of alarm. She rises and points dramatically at* FORSYTH.)

SIDNEY. Behold the strong intelligent man who has

gone out into the world to provide for his wife and children!

(*They are too surprised to speak.*)

EDGAR. Mother says we are ruined; is that true?

FORSYTH. Your mother is, as usual, quite correct.

SIDNEY (*to* FORSYTH). It appears that we owe this result to your skilful management.

FORSYTH (*icily*). I beg your pardon.

EDGAR. All right, father; she 's getting at me.

FORSYTH. I am glad to hear it; I was under the impression that her remark was addressed to me.

SIDNEY. It was. May I ask how long you have known that your affairs were in this state?

FORSYTH. How long?

SIDNEY. Yes, yes. How long? Six months?

FORSYTH. Probably. Does it matter?

SIDNEY. Of course it matters. Why on earth didn't you tell us before?

FORSYTH. My wife knew. I don't know that I was under any obligation to consult you.

SIDNEY. If you had you couldn't have been worse off than you are now, anyhow.

RITCHIE. Is it any good tackling the matter this way?

SIDNEY. Yes.

RITCHIE (*looking at* EDGAR). Don't you think——?

EDGAR. It 's no use looking at me. If you can't make Sid shut up, I 'm sure I can't.

SIDNEY. I complain that you 've treated us just like a couple of children.

FORSYTH. Is that surprising?

SIDNEY. We could have given you some useful advice, at any rate; at least, I 'm sure I could.

FORSYTH. I don't doubt it.

SIDNEY. For instance, why didn't you give up Brook Bank long ago, and go into a smaller house? What object was there in keeping this expensive place going?

EDGAR. You know, there 's a bit of sense in that.

FORSYTH. I lived at Brook Bank because I chose to do so.

SIDNEY. Yes, at other people's expense.

MRS. F. Sidney, pray be careful what you are saying.

SIDNEY. We may as well tell the truth so long as there 's no one to hear us. What madness this pretence of the last few months has been! We 've hung on here, getting deeper and deeper into the mire, just because you were afraid of what people would say.

EDGAR. Look here, Sid, you 'd better chuck it.

SIDNEY. You don't understand how I feel about this; I can't help it. I suppose I 've been brought up differently from you. We ought to have gone to live in a house at 7s. 6d. a week instead of staying here and getting into debt. But you wouldn't have considered that respectable, would you? No doubt you consider that it is more respectable to fail for twenty thousand pounds than to admit that you are just a poor man like the millions around you.

FORSYTH (*angrily*). These impossible ideas are the stock-in-trade of every blackguard of an agitator who prefers sponging in idleness to working honestly for a living.

SIDNEY. You ought to be the last person to bring that up against anybody.

FORSYTH. How dare you?

SIDNEY. What you call speculating I call gambling; and when you gamble without being able to pay if you lose, I call it thieving. You criticise my ideas and call them impossible. Well, I tell you what, if you had more of my impossible ideas and less of those of your class and your sex, you might be less of a gentleman, but you 'd be a good deal more of a man.

(SIDNEY *goes out of the room.*)

FORSYTH (*to* EDGAR). If you can't keep your wife in order you 'd better not bring her here.

EDGAR. She 'd no right to speak to you like that, but there was a certain amount of common sense in her remarks.

FORSYTH. Do I understand you to approve——

EDGAR. Oh no; I stand by my sex. At the same time you do seem to have made a mess of things on your own.

FORSYTH. I 've heard quite enough about that.

EDGAR. All right, I won't rub it in. But next time remember that two heads are better than one.

(FORSYTH *turns away impatiently.*)

MRS. F. Go to Sidney, Edgar.

FORSYTH. And inform her that I shall expect an apology before I speak to her again.

EDGAR. I don't think you 'll get one.

(EDGAR *goes out.*)

FORSYTH. Since Edgar appears to have no authority over his wife, Mary, perhaps you will take an opportunity of telling her that while she is in my house she will have to behave herself.

MRS. F. I will speak to her if you wish it—but—

(*She looks at* RITCHIE.)

RITCHIE. No, I should say no more about it.

FORSYTH. I beg your pardon ?

RITCHIE. Remember Sidney is an excitable girl, and I 've no doubt that she is already sorry for some of the things she said. Let it drop. You don't mind my giving you this advice ?

FORSYTH (*with cool insolence*). It is very kind of you, but I don't recollect asking for your advice.

RITCHIE (*flushing*). Oh, indeed ; I 'm sorry I spoke. But I thought since I 'd been invited to come here on this occasion——

FORSYTH. Did I ask you to come here ?

RITCHIE. No, but your wife did.

FORSYTH. I notice that it generally *is* my wife who asks you to come here. (*To* MRS. FORSYTH.) I should have thought that you might have had the good taste to manage without Mr. Ritchie to-day.

RITCHIE (*angrily*). Forsyth !

MRS. F. I asked Mr. Ritchie because he is one of our oldest friends, and I thought it would do you good to talk to him.

FORSYTH. You are not usually so solicitous about me. I imagine that there was also a desire to gossip about me behind my back, and console yourself with a little ready sympathy.

(MRS. FORSYTH *turns her back on* FORSYTH *and goes up to the fire.*)

RITCHIE. And if that 's true, I don't blame her. She 's never had much sympathy from you.

FORSYTH. Even as one of my wife's oldest friends, you presume on your position.

RITCHIE. Do I ? Well, I 'll presume a little further, by your leave. Your wife has been perfectly

loyal to you all this time. Until to-day she never told me a word of your difficulties and her struggles to conceal them. Never a word, I say, and, by gad, I wish she had done. Perhaps I could have helped her.

FORSYTH. I dare say. I believe you admire my wife.

RITCHIE. I do; I admire her immensely. I think she 's one of the finest women alive.

FORSYTH. You haven't had to live with her.

RITCHIE. And I think it 's a confounded shame that she 's tied to a man who doesn't appreciate her. Good evening.

(*He goes to the door.*)

FORSYTH. Good evening. You know the way out?

RITCHIE. I do.

FORSYTH. And when you 've got out perhaps you 'll be good enough never to enter my house again.

RITCHIE. I won't.

(RITCHIE *goes out—there is a pause.*)

FORSYTH. Recent events have been rather trying, I am afraid. I must apologise, Mary, for losing my temper in your presence.

MRS. F. (*in the arm-chair by the fire*). There is no need to apologise to me for anything you may choose to do.

FORSYTH. I am aware that you take little interest in me; but you will admit that I have never lost my temper before.

MRS. F. It would have been a great deal better if you had.

FORSYTH. Indeed!

MRS. F. It would have shown that you had some sort

of feeling for me under that polished exterior of yours.

FORSYTH. I have always treated you with respect.

MRS. F. Respect!

FORSYTH. Have I ever ill-treated you?

MRS. F. Never; nor have you ever ill-treated the Chippendale writing-desk in the drawing-room. We are both ornamental and valuable things to have about the house. Have you ever noticed how a woman of the lower classes who has been half killed by a drunken husband will go and plead for him in the police court next day? There is flesh and blood in relations that can stand such a strain. Those people are not merely pretending to be husband and wife, with a chasm between them.

FORSYTH. I don't quite understand your point of view. If you had wanted me to give you a black eye you should have offered me the proper provocation. I dare say your daughter-in-law could instruct you in that respect. (*He goes to the cabinet and takes a cigar.*)

(SIDNEY *comes in, and seeing* FORSYTH, *comes to him.*)

SIDNEY. I want to speak to you. I said some rather strong things just now. Well, I stick to my ideas, you understand, but I had no right to talk to you like I did, seeing that you are Edgar's father. So if you will allow me, I apologise to you.

FORSYTH. I am very glad to hear it. I will endeavour to forget your behaviour.

(FORSYTH *goes out.*)

SIDNEY. Oh, I wouldn't have apologised if I 'd known he was going to take it like that.

MRS. F. Perhaps your apology wasn't worded in quite the happiest way, my dear.

SIDNEY. Perhaps not, but I can't change my principles.

MRS. F. (*kindly*). Young people have strange notions; but you must be loyal to your class.

SIDNEY. So I am. I 'm not really one of the rich. My father worked hard all his life. He worked with his brain, but he called himself a workman.

MRS. F. Now you are Edgar's wife you must be loyal to him.

SIDNEY. No, I must be loyal to myself, first of all. (*Coming to her.*) Mother, I 'm afraid you are all disappointed in me.

MRS. F. Don't think that for a moment. Perhaps we don't understand each other very well yet, but we must all be patient.

SIDNEY. Patience is what I find so difficult. (*A slight pause.*) Mother, why didn't you tell me about father's money difficulties sooner ?

MRS. F. He didn't wish me to. Men are so selfish sometimes.

SIDNEY. I could have helped you ; wouldn't you have liked me to help you ?

MRS. F. I should, Sidney, I should. It was hard work to bear it all alone, and to seem cheerful all the time. (*Seizing* SIDNEY'S *hand passionately.*) Sidney, promise me that you 'll never let Edgar drift apart from you.

SIDNEY. I suppose that depends upon Edgar as much as upon me; but I promise you, mother, I 'll do my best.

MRS. F. That 's right. We shall all have to do our

best and pull together in the time that is coming. Have you realised what it means ?

SIDNEY. It means, I suppose, that we shall have to earn money.

MRS. F. Edgar and your father will have to, that is certain. The house and everything in it are going to be sold.

SIDNEY. Yes, of course. You will feel that terribly.

MRS. F. It isn't the loss of comfort and luxury that I shall feel, Sidney. I can do without motor-cars and servants and all the deference and respect that money brings. But it is the breaking up of my home that will be so painful, the parting from so many things that I treasure, not for their value, but for the sake of old associations. Think of it, Sidney, a sale here, in this dear house ; think of the intrusion of a crowd of eager strangers. To them it will be nothing but a day's excitement and adventure, to me it will be the loss of part of my life ; a part that can never be replaced. I can't bear to think of it. (MRS. FORSYTH *is crying gently.*)

SIDNEY (*much moved*). Poor mother.

(*The door opens and* JANE *comes in quietly, sobbing.* MRS. FORSYTH *pulls herself together.*)

MRS. F. Jane, what is it ?

JANE. Can I speak to you, please, ma'am ?

SIDNEY (*rising*). Oh, I can't stand this. (*She goes out of the room quickly.*)

MRS. F. Come, Jane. What are you crying about ?

JANE. Please, ma'am (*she sobs*), I shall have to leave you now.

MRS. F. Leave us ? Ah ! you have heard something, have you ?

JANE. Yes, ma'am, and the news is so sudden (*she sobs*). I 'm quite upset.

MRS. F. Yes, of course.

JANE. After being with you for twenty-five years.

MRS. F. (*considerably moved*). Dear Jane, it is good to know that you are so fond of us all. These trials show us who are our true friends. But you mustn't give way like this; you must keep a brave face like we are doing.

JANE. Well, ma'am (*she sobs*), I don't suppose you 'll feel it as hard as I shall.

MRS. F. You are upset by the trouble which has come upon us, aren't you ?

JANE. Trouble, ma'am ? No, I 'm crying for joy.

MRS. F. What do you mean, Jane ?

JANE. Please, ma'am, if you don't mind, my uncle in Australia is dead and he 's left me twenty thousand pounds. (*She sobs.*)

MRS. F. (*amazed*). Twenty thousand pounds, Jane! (*She stares at* JANE, *and then, struck by the injustice of a Providence which permits itself such an irony as this, she exclaims.*) Oh, how cruel, how cruel! What can *you* do with twenty thousand pounds ?

JANE (*sobbing*). I 've been wondering, ma'am.

MRS. F. When there are others whom it would save from ruin and disgrace !

(MRS. FORSYTH *stops, trying to subdue her feelings. There is a slight pause.*)

JANE. I 've had a letter from a solicitor in London. He says I can have an advance at once, so if you please, ma'am, I want to know if you 'll let me off now without a month's notice.

MRS. F. (*quietly*). Yes, Jane, you may go whenever

you like, of course. (*Very kindly.*) You mustn't take any notice of what I said just now. I was so surprised. I am delighted to hear of your good fortune. You will have all our good wishes in your new life.

JANE. Thank you, ma'am.

(JANE *goes out quietly, drying her eyes. When she has gone,* MRS. FORSYTH *sits at the table and suddenly buries her head in her arms.*)

The CURTAIN *falls.*

ACT III

The scene is again the morning-room at Brook Bank on a midsummer afternoon, three months after the events which took place in the Second Act. The window at the back is seen now to be a French window opening on to wide and pleasant private grounds. The furniture is all pushed to the walls. The table, formerly in the centre, stands in front of the empty fireplace. All the small ornaments are placed in a mass upon the table. Every picture, every piece of furniture, bears an oblong white ticket, marked 'Lot 50,' 'Lot 51,' and so on. In short, the room is prepared for a sale by auction. Personal belongings, such as photographs, have been removed.

SIDNEY FORSYTH *is near the window, strapping a large portmanteau which stands on a chair. She is wearing simple out-door clothes, with a hat. A low whistle is heard from outside.* SIDNEY *looks up.*

SIDNEY. Hello! Who 's there?

RITCHIE (*outside*). It 's me. (*He appears at the window.*)

SIDNEY. Mr. Ritchie. (*Holding out her hand.*) How do you do?

RITCHIE. Quite well, thanks. (*Peering inside.*) Where 's Forsyth?

SIDNEY. He is out. Do you want him?

RITCHIE. No, thank you, I do not. If he 's out I 'll come in.

SIDNEY. Do, you 'll be quite safe.

RITCHIE (*entering*). I was thinking more of his safety than my own. You know why I 've never been here since that eventful day ?

SIDNEY. You had a bit of a row.

RITCHIE. I said I 'd never enter his house again.

SIDNEY. But you 've done so.

RITCHIE. No, this isn't Forsyth's house now. It 's mine. I 've just bought it.

SIDNEY. Oh !

RITCHIE. However, I should have come in any case, because I suppose you are leaving to-day ?

SIDNEY. Yes, the sale begins to-morrow.

RITCHIE. Where are you going, when you leave ?

SIDNEY. Lodgings ; 235 Upper Cornbank Street ; Mrs. Slater. (*He jots it down.*) We 're going to live within our income in future.

RITCHIE. You 're still as much of a Socialist and Suffragist as ever ?

SIDNEY. More than ever.

RITCHIE. Bravo ! That shows spirit, at any rate. I 'm afraid you have against you the compact majority, as Ibsen puts it.

SIDNEY. And as Carlyle puts it, the majority of people in this country are fools.

RITCHIE. The majority of them are women, anyhow. However, that 's not what I came to talk about. Forsyth is out, you say ; where 's he gone ?

SIDNEY. If he follows his usual custom, he 's gone to get drunk.

RITCHIE (*nodding*). I 've heard so. Is he much changed ?

SIDNEY (*quietly*). I don't think he will live very long.

RITCHIE. Ah ! And Edgar ? What has he been up to for the last three months ?

SIDNEY. Looking for something to do.

RITCHIE. What, for three months ?

SIDNEY. Yes. You see, he intended to go into Parliament, so of course it 's difficult to find anything that he 's fit for.

RITCHIE. Why hasn't he been to see me ?

SIDNEY. He has kept away from his friends. I fancy he is too proud to go to them.

RITCHIE. He 'll get over that in time.

SIDNEY. But, meanwhile, I 'm not too proud. Can you find me some work ?

RITCHIE. You ? What can you do ?

SIDNEY. I can use a typewriter and write shorthand. I used to type all father's articles for him.

RITCHIE. How many words a minute ?

SIDNEY. Eighty.

RITCHIE. That 's all right. I want a typist, I 'll engage you.

SIDNEY. How much a week ?

RITCHIE (*hesitating*). Thirty-five shillings.

SIDNEY. Is that the usual wage ?

RITCHIE. Yes. I couldn't afford to pay more.

SIDNEY. You are quite sure you 're not paying me more than the market price ?

RITCHIE. Why should I ? I don't know if you 're worth it.

SIDNEY. I mean, in order to help us.

RITCHIE (*lying nobly*). Oh no. Shouldn't think of it. I 'm a business man.

SIDNEY. Thirty-five shillings. It 's not so very much, either. All right, that 's a bargain.

RITCHIE. When can you start ?

SIDNEY. To-morrow.

RITCHIE. Very well. Nine o'clock in the morning. Don't be late.

SIDNEY. By the way, don't tell any of the others just yet.

RITCHIE. Not if you don't wish it.

SIDNEY. There may be a row if it isn't broken gently. Edgar's a bit of a mule at times, and it isn't very pleasant for a man who thinks a good deal of his sex to find that nobody wants his services whilst his wife can command thirty-five shillings a week in the open market.

RITCHIE (*grinning to himself*). I should think it would be galling.

(MRS. FORSYTH *opens the door, dressed for going out.*)

MRS. F. (*seeing* RITCHIE). Oh ! You ? (*She is surprised.*)

RITCHIE. I just happened to look in. I 'm not intruding ?

MRS. F. I am very glad to see you.

(*There is a loud ring at the front door.*)

MRS. F. (*to* SIDNEY). Will you go, dear ?

(SIDNEY *runs out.*)

MRS. F. (*smiling*). The servants have all gone, you see. We have to do the housework ourselves.

RITCHIE. Well, it 'll do you no harm for a change.

MRS. F. One hardly realises what a lot of things

there are to do in a house, until one has to do them one's self.

RITCHIE. Jane has left you too. I heard she had come into some money.

MRS. F. Yes, she is quite a fine lady now, I believe.

(SIDNEY *opens the door and comes in.*)

SIDNEY (*announcing*). Miss Gregory.

(JANE, *gorgeously overdressed and looking extremely hot, enters the room sedately.*)

MRS. F. Miss—Miss who ?

JANE. It 's only Jane. Don't take any notice of her, ma'am.

MRS. F. (*greeting her warmly*). Why, Jane, how are you ? I hardly knew you.

JANE. No, ma'am. I believe I *am* much improved.

MRS. F. But you mustn't call me ' ma'am ' now.

JANE. No, Mrs. Forsyth, I 'm aware of it ; but it 's force of habit.

RITCHIE. You see, you only called Mrs. Forsyth ' ma'am ' because she 'd got money and you hadn't.

SIDNEY. Yes ; *we* ought to call Jane ' ma'am ' now—(*to* RITCHIE), oughtn't we, ' sir ' ?

(SIDNEY *smiles at him ; he shakes his fist at her.*)

JANE. You don't think I 'm taking a liberty in calling to see you so informal, do you ?

MRS. F. Not at all.

JANE. I can't stay very long because I 've got one of them taxi-cabs waiting in the road, and I shan't be able to settle down comfortably with that clock thing going round all the time.

MRS. F. We are just going to have a cup of tea before leaving. You 'll stop for that, won't you ?

JANE (*politely*). I 'm much obliged to you.

SIDNEY. I 'll go and make it.

MRS. F. The kettle is on the small gas stove.

JANE. They haven't cut off the gas, then ?

SIDNEY. Not yet. (*She goes to the door.*)

JANE. I 'd better come and help you. That little gas stove always fires back when you light it.

SIDNEY. Yes, Jane, come along; there 's a dear.

(SIDNEY *goes out.*)

MRS. F. Oh no, there 's no need.

JANE. I 'm not too proud; I often feel the want of something to do nowadays.

MRS. F. Where are you living now, Jane ?

JANE. *Midland Hotel.*

(JANE *goes out.*)

RITCHIE. Good old Jane. (*He laughs heartily.*)

MRS. F. Isn't she quaint ? But how kind of her to come and see us. We see so few of our old friends now.

RITCHIE. You know how it is you haven't seen me.

MRS. F. Of course. I didn't mean you.

RITCHIE. And how is Forsyth, now ?

MRS. F. I 'm afraid he 's not at all well.

RITCHIE. Ah !

(*There is a pause.*)

RITCHIE. Come now, won't you tell me everything ?

MRS. F. There is really nothing to tell. You know that we are leaving here to-day. Would you like our address ?

RITCHIE. I 've got it, thanks.

MRS. F. We have not a farthing left, of course. Sidney had a few pounds of her father's; we are living on that at present.

RITCHIE. And after ?

MRS. F. Edgar is hoping to find some employment every day.

RITCHIE. Is he ?

MRS. F. Now that the worst is over I begin to feel less despondent.

RITCHIE. And you are not at all unhappy ?

MRS. F. Why should I be unhappy ?

RITCHIE. I don't know, that 's why I 'm asking.

MRS. F. (*calmly*). I am not at all unhappy.

(JANE *with her silk skirt pinned up to her waist, revealing a gaudy striped underskirt, pushes the door open, bearing a tray with the tea-things.*)

JANE. Now, wherever shall I put this ?

RITCHIE (*making room on the table*). Allow me.

JANE (*graciously acknowledging his services*). It 's most kind of you, I 'm sure, Mr. Ritchie.

MRS. F. Thank you, Jane, so much.

JANE. Don't mention it. Oh, Mr. Ritchie, I 'm thinking of coming to call on you.

RITCHIE. Delighted. I 'm at home most evenings after six.

JANE. I don't mean at your house ; it wouldn't be proper. You 're a bachelor.

RITCHIE. My housekeeper will act as chaperon.

JANE (*grinning*). Go along with you. I mean on business.

RITCHIE. I shall be most gratified.

JANE. I 'm thinking of buying a motor-car, and I thought you might as well have the order as any one else, seeing we 're old friends.

(JANE *scutters out.*)

RITCHIE. Well, Mrs. Forsyth, I 'll be getting along now.

MRS. F. Won't you stay to tea ?

RITCHIE. No, thanks. By the way, I wanted to say one thing to you—er——

MRS. F. Yes.

RITCHIE. I don't quite know how to put it—but—er——

MRS. F. Thank you, it is good of you. Yes, I promise I will.

RITCHIE. But you don't know what it is I want to say.

MRS. F. Yes, I do. You want me to let you help us if the worst comes to the worst, and we are left without resources.

RITCHIE. That 's it. I 've been wondering how to say it all the time I 've been here.

MRS. F. I know you have.

RITCHIE. Then you promise ?

MRS. F. I know you too well to refuse. (*She shakes his hand.*)

RITCHIE (*taking his hat*). Then I 'll say good-bye, for the present.

MRS. F. (*opening the door*). I 'll let you out, if you must go.

RITCHIE. I 'm afraid so. Somebody might not be pleased if he found me here.

(JANE *comes in with a teapot.*)

JANE. Now you 're never going, Mr. Ritchie, just before the tea. I 've put in five teaspoonfuls.

RITCHIE. Five ?

JANE. Yes, one each and one for the pot. However, if you must you must. We shall meet again.

(*She gracefully shakes hands, with the teapot still clasped in her left hand, then she crosses to the table to put it down.* SIDNEY *enters with a jug of hot water.*)

MRS. F. Mr. Ritchie is going, Sidney.

(MRS. FORSYTH *leads the way out.*)

SIDNEY. Sorry you can't stay. (*She shakes hands, still holding the water jug.*)

RITCHIE. Do you really mean to turn up to-morrow ?

SIDNEY. Do I mean it ? I should think so ; nine o'clock prompt.

(RITCHIE *nods and goes out.* SIDNEY *puts the hot-water jug on the table.* JANE *unpins and shakes down her dress, and* SIDNEY *pours out three cups of tea.*)

JANE. One thing I do like about that Mr. Ritchie. He treats me just the same as he did when I was poor.

SIDNEY. He still makes fun of you, if that's what you mean.

JANE. He always was a pleasant gentleman. I like it.

SIDNEY. I'm not sure if he wasn't trying to make fun of *me* as well ; and I *don't* like it. I'm afraid we've all got pretty short tempers at present.

JANE. Yours never was very certain, was it ? (*Sympathetically.*) But it must be trying to lose all your money so sudden.

SIDNEY. Well, Jane, mind you take care of your money.

JANE. I *shall* do that. I've had a lesson from you. To begin with, I'm thinking of leaving the hotel.

SIDNEY. Indeed ?

JANE. Yes, it's that expensive. I've taken a nice little house of my own.

SIDNEY. Whereabouts ?

JANE. I wrote out the address for you. (*Producing a slip of paper.*) Here it is.

SIDNEY (*taking the paper*). Thank you.

JANE (*confidentially*). It was the hotel beds I couldn't fancy. You never know who 's been sleeping there before you.

(MRS. FORSYTH *returns.* SIDNEY *hands* JANE *her tea.*)

JANE (*producing a handkerchief and spreading it over her lap*). Thank you kindly.

SIDNEY. Here 's your tea, mother.

MRS. F. (*taking her cup*). Well, Jane, it 's very good of you to come and see us.

JANE. Yes, Mrs. Forsyth. You see, I only heard of your troubles yesterday, or I 'd have come sooner.

MRS. F. Only yesterday ?

JANE. Yes. You 'll remember I left the day after I gave you notice, and went straight to London to see my lawyer.

MRS. F. Of course. And you stayed in London all alone ?

JANE. Well, yes. It doesn't sound hardly respectable, but I thought there was no harm in it at my time of life.

MRS. F. And what did you do with yourself ?

JANE. There are a lot of things to see in London. Oh, I enjoyed myself fairly. And then I decided to settle down at Salchester, so I came back to look round.

MRS. F. Yes ?

JANE. And all at once I came across it in a newspaper at the hotel (*producing a cutting*) : ' Important sale of valuable modern household furniture and appointments, including capital Spanish mahogany suite of 25 pieces, by Willing and Gallows ; superb

mahogany eight-foot dining-table with " D " ends, magnificent elaborately carved mahogany side-board ' (*breaking off*). Ay, I thought, I know you, my friends ; many 's the hour I 've spent in putting a polish on you. (*Referring to the cutting.*) ' All that messuage or dwelling-house known as—' Oh no, that 's the wrong one.

(Mrs. Forsyth *rises quickly and puts her cup down.*)

Sidney. All right, Jane; there 's no need to read any more.

Jane. I think I know it off by heart, now. And when I read all the things that I knew so well I could hardly bear to think of them in strange houses. (*She sobs.*) I remember once knocking a corner off the exceedingly handsome inlaid Chippendale cabinet. (*She sobs and dabs her eyes with her handkerchief.*)

Sidney (*rescuing* Jane's *cup*). You 'd better let me put your cup down. (*She puts* Jane's *cup and her own on the table.*)

Mrs. F. (*considerably moved*). We appreciate your sympathy, Jane, believe me.

Jane. Well, I thought, I 've plenty of money myself, and if there 's any of these articles that the mistress would like me to buy in for her——

Mrs. F. No, no, Jane ; it *is* good of you ; but you mustn't think of doing that. We have nowhere to put anything of the sort, now.

Jane (*wiping her eyes*). Well, Mrs. Forsyth, you know best, of course.

(Edgar *comes in through the window; he looks tired and depressed.*)

MRS. F. We have an old friend, Edgar.

EDGAR. Why, it 's Jane ! (*He shakes hands with her.*)

JANE. Oh, Mr. Edgar, I *am* glad to see you again. (*She sobs heartily.*)

EDGAR. You mustn't cry like that. Buck up, Jane. Is that your taxi-cab outside ?

JANE. Bless me, I forgot all about it. Goodness knows how much I shall owe by this time. Good-bye, Mrs. Forsyth.

MRS. F. Good-bye, Jane. (*She shakes* JANE'S *hand.*) Thank you very much.

SIDNEY. I 'll see you out, Jane, if you must go.

JANE. Thank you kindly. And you 'll let me know if there 's anything I can do for you.

MRS. F. We will, Jane, I promise.

JANE. Thank you, kindly. (JANE, *stifling a sob, follows* SIDNEY *out of the door.*)

(EDGAR *sits down wearily.* MRS. FORSYTH *watches him ; there is a slight pause.*)

MRS. F. (*at length*). Well, Edgar ?

EDGAR. I saw the man, but it 's no good. He wants some one about seventeen or eighteen.

MRS. F. But surely, if you are willing ?

EDGAR. No ; he says that if a fellow has reached twenty-six without any experience, he 's too old to learn.

MRS. F. Don't you think that one of our friends might find you something ?

EDGAR. There 's only Ritchie I should care to ask ; and, after that row with father, I don't suppose he would be much inclined to help us.

MRS. F. I think he would. In fact, I am certain of it.

EDGAR. How do you know ?

MRS. F. Mr. Ritchie has been here this afternoon. He didn't quarrel with me, you know.

EDGAR. And was he just the same as ever ?

MRS. F. Just the same.

EDGAR. That makes a difference. It might be worth while trying him. You see, mother, I 'm getting pretty desperate. When a fellow is anxious to work, it is hard lines that he shouldn't find anything to do.

MRS. F. We used to think that there were no genuine unemployed.

EDGAR. We know better, now. I quite dread telling Sid about this latest fiasco. I believe she 's beginning to lose confidence in me.

MRS. F. Never, Edgar.

EDGAR. I don't know ; there 's often a queer look in her eye nowadays. You see, I 've always maintained that a woman ought to look to her husband for support, and all the rest of it.

MRS. F. Surely that is right.

EDGAR. Of course it 's right ; but when a man has talked like that, and then can't earn enough to keep even himself, well, it makes him look a bit of a fool.

MRS. F. You mustn't lose heart. What about that advertisement I showed you this morning ?

EDGAR. I 'm sick of advertisements. For the last one I answered there were 217 applications. Mother, why didn't I learn something when I was younger ?

MRS. F. I imagine that you did, Edgar ; you were educated like every other English gentleman.

EDGAR. I suppose that 's why I 'm not fit for anything.

(SIDNEY *comes into the room quickly.*)

SIDNEY (*abruptly*). Your father has come home.

EDGAR. Where has he been ?

SIDNEY. I understand he has been out into the world trying to provide for his wife and children. You 'd better go and help him to find the hat-stand.

(MRS. FORSYTH *rises, with a slight exclamation.*)

EDGAR. Sidney ! (*He opens the door.*)

FORSYTH (*outside*). Hello ! Edgar, my boy; I 've good news.

(FORSYTH *enters unsteadily. He has been drinking, but of course is not grotesquely drunk. A slight difficulty is observed in his utterance. His face is puffy and more coarse, a very distinct change for the worse is to be discerned in his appearance. They watch him anxiously without speaking.*)

What are you all looking at me like that for, eh ? Can't you say something ? I tell you I 've good news.

MRS. F. What good news ?

FORSYTH. Ah, you 're so surprised. (*Crossing to* MRS. FORSYTH's *chair.*) Mary, why don't you congratulate me ?

(*As he puts his hand on the chair,* MRS. FORSYTH *rises quietly and moves away.* FORSYTH *contemplates the chair.*)

FORSYTH. What the deuce is this ticket pasted on the chair for ?

SIDNEY. You are perhaps not aware that your furniture is going to be sold by auction to-morrow.

FORSYTH. Of course, I remember ; I remember all

about it. Silly idea, though, disfiguring the things like that. (*He sits in the chair.*) Let me see, what was I saying ?

MRS. F. There was some good news ?

FORSYTH. Yes, I 'm telling you about it. We shall make a fortune.

EDGAR. What do you mean ?

FORSYTH. You hadn't much opinion of my business ability, any of you. Well, you 'll see. I 've been having a serious conversation with—what 's his name—little man with sandy moustache. What 's his name, Edgar ?

EDGAR. I don't know.

FORSYTH. Harrison ! That 's it. Harrison.

EDGAR. Oh, that fellow.

FORSYTH. He 's offered me a partnership in a business he 's starting. Wine and spirit business.

SIDNEY. You should know something about that, at any rate.

FORSYTH. Of course. Excellent idea. A man in my position, with any amount of friends. I should be able to get lots of customers.

MRS. F. Are you really serious about it ?

FORSYTH. Wholesale business, of course. I 'm not going to turn publican.

SIDNEY. There might be some money in it if you were.

FORSYTH. Simply take orders from my friends. See them at the club. Capital idea.

EDGAR. And this man offers you a partnership ?

FORSYTH. On one condition. That I put a sum of money into the business. Two hundred pounds.

SIDNEY. Where are you going to find two hundred pounds ?

FORSYTH. Easy enough. Plenty of friends will lend it to me.

EDGAR. That 's all rot, father. No one will lend you the money. Besides, that man Harrison is a noted blackguard.

FORSYTH. What do you mean ? He 's a friend of mine.

SIDNEY. That 's not much in his favour.

EDGAR. Of course, you can try it. But I 've another suggestion. Why shouldn't I go and see old Ritchie ?

FORSYTH. Who ? Ritchie ?

EDGAR. Yes. He told mother that he 'd be very glad to help us.

FORSYTH (*getting up*). What 's that ?

MRS. F. Edgar, you shouldn't have——

FORSYTH (*to* MRS. FORSYTH). Have you been seeing that fellow ?

MRS. F. He called this afternoon.

FORSYTH. He 's been meeting you secretly ?

MRS. F. There was nothing secret about it. Sidney saw him too.

EDGAR. What does it matter if Ritchie *has* called to see mother ?

FORSYTH. You 'd better ask your mother that question.

MRS. F. I am sure that not even you could answer it.

FORSYTH (*much more sober by this time*). Has his sympathy taken the practical form of offering you any financial assistance ?

MRS. F. It has.

FORSYTH (*fiercely*). Have you been taking money from him ?

MRS. F. I said he had offered it. I did not say that I had accepted it. I should not do that without consulting the rest of you.

FORSYTH (*sneering*). How am I to believe that ?

EDGAR. Look here, father——

FORSYTH. Hold your tongue. (*To* MRS. FORSYTH.) Ritchie has offered money to you. Very well ; I require two hundred pounds. You shall ask him to lend it to you.

MRS. F. (*rising*). You are not serious !

FORSYTH (*sneeringly*). He will be only too glad to oblige *you*.

MRS. F. But how can I ask him for such a large sum ?

FORSYTH. I dare say you will find means to persuade him.

(MRS. FORSYTH *looks at* FORSYTH *in amazement and horror. Then she turns uncertainly from him.*)

MRS. F. Edgar !—Sidney !— (*She sinks into her chair, and very quietly covers her face with her hands. She is not in tears.* EDGAR *is dumb.* SIDNEY *moves between* FORSYTH *and* MRS. FORSYTH.)

SIDNEY (*to* FORSYTH). I have had the profoundest contempt for you for some time.

FORSYTH. I was not addressing you. My only regret is that you ever entered my family.

SIDNEY. Since I am here I will take the opportunity of telling you how much I despise you.

FORSYTH. Leave this house ! Let me never see you again !

SIDNEY. I will not leave this house while mother is in it, unless Edgar intends to protect her from

insult. If I had been in his place I'd have knocked you down.

FORSYTH. Ah! (*With a muttered exclamation he lifts his hand to strike* SIDNEY. EDGAR, *who has drawn near, suddenly springs forward and catches* FORSYTH'S *arm.* FORSYTH, *flushed with rage and excitement, is seized with a sudden fit of choking—apoplectic in nature, but very slight and brief—and half falls on* EDGAR'S *shoulder for support. Gradually recovering himself, he pushes* EDGAR *away slightly, and stands unsteadily alone in the middle of the room. Not a syllable has been uttered by the others, who have watched him quietly. Then he turns to the door, and very feebly and slowly goes out of the room.*)

MRS. F. (*faintly*). I can't bear this much longer.

SIDNEY. Forgive me, dear, if I said things——

MRS. F. You did what you thought best. I must go and see to your father; he is ill, I am afraid. (*She rises and goes to the door.*) Oh, dear; what is going to happen to us all? (*She goes out.*)

(*There is a long pause.*)

EDGAR. What time are we leaving here?

SIDNEY. The cab was ordered for five.

EDGAR. Are you quite ready? Is there anything I can do?

SIDNEY. No; I've done everything, thanks. By the way, you went to see about the place in that shipping office.

EDGAR. Yes.

SIDNEY (*after a pause*). I suppose it was no good?

EDGAR. No.

SIDNEY. I didn't expect it would be. You don't seem to have much luck.

EDGAR. I think you might show a bit more sympathy than you do, Sidney.

SIDNEY. I'm sorry, dear; I didn't mean to be unkind. But we may as well face the situation; it will be very serious if we don't do something soon.

EDGAR. I think a husband and wife ought to stand by each other in any trouble.

SIDNEY. I quite agree with you. Will you let me help you?

EDGAR. Of course I will. You know how grateful I shall be for advice and sympathy——

SIDNEY. Hang your sympathy! It's money we want. Now, look here, suppose I try to get some work to do, as well as you?

EDGAR. That 's all nonsense, Sid; I did expect you 'd propose something practical.

SIDNEY. Plenty of women are earning their living nowadays.

EDGAR. Your suggestion is out of the question. You couldn't get a situation.

SIDNEY. Couldn't I?

EDGAR. Well, if *I* can't, I don't imagine *you* could.

SIDNEY. I don't see why you should assume that I am as incompetent as you. I know how to use a typewriter. Suppose I *did* find a place?

EDGAR. I shouldn't allow you to take it.

SIDNEY (*ominously*). You wouldn't allow me?

EDGAR. I should think not. What? Let you spend your time in an office, carrying out the orders of other men, and probably having to submit to their coarse attentions?

SIDNEY. You haven't a very good opinion of your sex.

EDGAR. Sidney, you must see how impossible it would be. I couldn't endure the thought of your going to an office every day. Now I wouldn't object if you could do some work that wouldn't take you out of your home.

SIDNEY. Admirable! If I could get some sewing, for instance?

EDGAR. Well, that 's more suitable work for a woman.

SIDNEY. The sort of work for me, is the sort of work I understand.

EDGAR. I forbid you to think of typewriting, at any rate.

SIDNEY. You forbid me! How will you prevent me?

EDGAR. I shall assert my authority as a husband.

SIDNEY. I don't admit you have any. I will *not* be bound by you and your ideas. I must think for myself.

EDGAR. No decent husband could live on his wife's earnings. I tell you that I will provide for you, in time.

SIDNEY. Meanwhile, let me provide for myself and your mother, at any rate. I will let you keep your father with pleasure.

EDGAR (*going to the door*). I decline to discuss this matter with you any further.

SIDNEY. Very well; I warn you that I am going to a situation to-morrow morning.

EDGAR. While you are my wife I refuse to allow you to do so.

SIDNEY. Then I will not be your wife any longer.

(*She goes towards the window.*)

EDGAR. Sidney, be reasonable.

SIDNEY (*pinning on her hat*). I am reasonable, and you are not. It 's no use, Edgar; my views are hopelessly opposed to yours and your parents'. I 've done my best to make allowances for you, but I can't stand it any longer.

EDGAR. But you are not leaving me ? You can't go away now, like this.

SIDNEY (*indicating the portmanteau by the window*). I have everything I want in here.

EDGAR. You are assuming a great deal if you think that I shall forget this when you come back and beg me to forgive you.

SIDNEY. *You* will have to ask me to come back to *you*; and you will have to admit my right to think freely for myself before I do so.

(*She takes the portmanteau.*)

EDGAR. But where are you going ?

SIDNEY. I am going to earn my own living; and I shall be the first of the Forsyths who has done that for a good many years. (SIDNEY *goes out of the window, carrying the portmanteau.*)

(EDGAR *stands helplessly looking at the window, and then suddenly appears to make up his mind. He hastily crosses to the window, evidently with the idea of calling* SIDNEY *back; but at the sill he pulls himself up and changes his mind. Then he turns and slowly goes to an arm-chair and sits down.*)

(*After a slight pause* MRS. FORSYTH'S *voice is heard faintly, at a distance.*)

MRS. F. (*outside*). Edgar ! Edgar !

(MRS. FORSYTH *flings the door open, and stands*

in the doorway, supporting herself by the door jamb.)

Edgar ! Your father, go to your father !

EDGAR. What 's the matter ?

MRS. F. (*coming to the centre of the room*). Something has happened !

EDGAR. What ! A stroke ? What is it ?

MRS. F. I think so, a stroke. I 'm afraid he—he— (*She cannot speak.*)

EDGAR (*stunned*). Dead ? Not dead ?

(MRS. FORSYTH *nods assent, speechless, her face a mask of horror.* EDGAR *quickly and silently crosses to the door. As he reaches it* MRS. FORSYTH *sways suddenly and falls in a dead faint on to the floor.*)

The CURTAIN *falls.*

ACT IV

The office at SAMUEL RITCHIE'S *motor depôt in Salchester is a large, pleasant, square room. In the wall facing the spectator are two doors; that on the left showing through its pane of ground glass the word 'Office' printed so as to be read from the other side.*

It leads from the shop, or 'depôt' as the trade would have it called. The other door opens into RITCHIE'S *private office and bears the name 'Mr. Ritchie' upon it. Against the wall between these doors there is placed a large double desk with its end to the spectator; chairs are on each side, facing each other. An electric light hangs low over it. On its left side there is a telephone, and on the right side a typewriter. Papers, books, etc., are strewn about it. An arm-chair is at the near end, turned away from the desk. The fireplace, with a couple of wooden arm-chairs near, is on the left of the room; two large windows are on the right, and running along beneath them is a high narrow desk covered with catalogues and lumber, having a high office stool in front of it. A safe is in the right-hand far corner, and a store cupboard in the left-hand one. Rugs on the floor and photographs of motor-cars on the walls complete the principal features of the office. The fire is lighted; it is the middle of a September afternoon, about three months after the date of the Third Act.*

SIDNEY *is sitting at the right desk, dressed in a black skirt and white blouse, and* RITCHIE *is standing in front of the fireplace, a cigarette in his lips, dictating.*

RITCHIE. 'Your representative, Mr. Jones, when we saw him on Thursday, expressed himself (*correcting himself*)—gave us to understand, that he was perfectly satisfied. Under the circumstances we do not think that you have any cause for complaint, and unless we receive a cheque in settlement before the end of the week we shall be obliged —reluctantly obliged—to place the matter in our solicitor's hands. Yours, etc.' There, I think that ought to warm them up, eh ?

SIDNEY. It ought to. Are there any more ?

RITCHIE. I think that 's the last.

(*He goes to the desk and consults a memorandum tablet.* SIDNEY *gathers up and arranges several sheets covered with shorthand characters. The telephone bell rings.* RITCHIE, *being nearest the instrument, answers the bell.*)

RITCHIE. Hello !—Yes, I 'm speaking now—Who do you say wants to see me ?—Oh ! (*He looks at* SIDNEY *and reflects.*) Yes, I 'll see him now. Just a moment ; don't send him in yet. (*He looks again at* SIDNEY *in a perplexed way, and then at the two doors ; he is distinctly puzzled.*) (*At last.*) Do you mind taking your work into my office for a little while, Miss Sidney ?

SIDNEY (*picking up her paper*). Certainly.

RITCHIE. A man's called to see me on a bit of private business, and—er——

SIDNEY. Don't apologise. There 's no fire in your office.

(*She goes out, and* RITCHIE *follows her to the door and quietly turns the key in the lock. Then he goes to the telephone and speaks.*)

RITCHIE. Tell Mr. Forsyth to come in now, Harry.

(RITCHIE *goes to the door on the left, and opens it. After a slight pause,* EDGAR, *dressed in a dark—but not black—suit, with a black tie, enters.*)

RITCHIE (*shaking hands*). Well, my dear boy, how are you ?

EDGAR. Fairly well, thanks. And you ?

RITCHIE. Oh, splendid ; come and sit down.

(EDGAR *sits by the fire and* RITCHIE *in the centre arm-chair by the desk.*)

RITCHIE. Do you know, I haven't seen you since your father's death.

EDGAR. No.

RITCHIE. It was terribly sudden. I was very shocked to hear about it.

EDGAR. Yes, it was a shock to all of us.

(*There is a long pause, neither knowing what to say.*)

EDGAR. You heard about Sidney, I suppose ?

RITCHIE. I heard she had left you. Have you never seen her since ?

EDGAR. Never. She wrote after father died, and since then we have had a letter every week.

RITCHIE. Indeed.

EDGAR. Every Saturday night she sends us a postal order for one pound.

RITCHIE. Really ; she must be doing very well.

EDGAR (*producing a sheaf of papers*). I have them here. Twelve postal orders.

RITCHIE. Why on earth haven't you cashed them ?

EDGAR. Because she has only sent them to annoy me.

RITCHIE. My word, I wish some one would annoy me the same way.

EDGAR. I am carrying them about so that I can return them if I should meet her in the street. It is most exasperating. You see, I can't send them back by post, because I haven't the least idea where she is.

RITCHIE. I dare say she isn't very far away.

(*He slowly turns his head and looks at the door of the private office.*)

RITCHIE. But come, how 's your mother ? You haven't told me anything about her.

EDGAR. You 'll be able to see for yourself soon, because she 's calling for me here this afternoon.

RITCHIE. I 'm very glad to hear it.

EDGAR. I came on first, because I want to speak to you on business.

RITCHIE. Fire away.

EDGAR. I wonder—I wonder whether you could help me to find something to do.

RITCHIE. What, do you mean to say you haven't managed it yet ?

EDGAR. Excuse me, I 've had two situations in the last three months.

RITCHIE. Good Lord !

EDGAR. The first was through an advertisement. Invoice Clerk wanted for Home Trade Warehouse ;

smart, must be quick at figures. I got the place.

RITCHIE. Well, how did you lose it ?

EDGAR. I suppose I wasn't quick enough at figures. Then I found a job at a factory as timekeeper.

RITCHIE. Timekeeper ?

EDGAR. Yes ; I lost that because I was so often late in the mornings.

RITCHIE. You don't seem to have been exactly fitted for the positions you occupied.

EDGAR. No. You 're quite right. However, I earned a little money that way, and mother had a few bits of jewellery that belonged to her before she was married. We 've been selling those.

RITCHIE. Dear me ! (*He gets up and walks about.*) Why didn't you come to me before ?

EDGAR. I thought we 'd see what we could do on our own.

RITCHIE. You were too proud to come to your old friend.

EDGAR. Perhaps I was, but I 've had a good deal of the pride knocked out of me lately.

RITCHIE. I 'm glad to hear it. You 'll find you 're none the worse for it.

(EDGAR *does not reply, and* RITCHIE *resumes his seat.*)

RITCHIE. Well now, let us see, what can you do ?

EDGAR. Nothing.

RITCHIE. Then I don't fancy there 'll be much demand for your services. Come now, my dear chap, every man is good for something.

EDGAR. I 've never had to do anything, you see.

The only work I did was messing about with our motor-cars.

RITCHIE. Yes, you rather liked that, didn't you ?

EDGAR. I was awfully fond of it. There 's not much about a motor that I don't understand.

RITCHIE. Very well then, there you are. I told you every man is good for something.

EDGAR (*doubtfully*). I don't think I should care to be a chauffeur.

RITCHIE. Chauffeur be hanged. I earn my living by motor-cars, and *I 'm* not a chauffeur.

EDGAR. But you sell them.

RITCHIE. I have people to help me, haven't I ?

EDGAR (*excited*). Do you think you could find me a place in a motor depôt then ?

RITCHIE. I can find you a place here.

EDGAR. Here ? With you ? By Jove, that would be fine ! (*Then changing his manner.*) No, you 're only doing this out of kindness. You don't really want any one.

RITCHIE. I do, on my honour. My business is getting bigger every month, and I 've been thinking of engaging another salesman for some time.

EDGAR. If you think I 'm fit for it, I 'd do my best.

RITCHIE. I 'll keep you up to the mark. But I make one condition. On your own confession you are changeable and impulsive. You must promise me to give the thing a fair trial. Let me have your word of honour that you 'll stay with me at least a month.

EDGAR. I will.

RITCHIE. Your word of honour. Shake hands. (*They shake hands.*) I 'll give you thirty shillings

a week, and one and a quarter per cent. commission on any sales.

EDGAR. That 'll do for me.

RITCHIE. Good. Now I 'll introduce you to my typist.

(*He goes to the private office door and unlocks it.*)

EDGAR. Why do you keep her locked up ?

RITCHIE. So that she can't come out until she 's wanted. (*He opens the door and calls.*) Miss Sidney, I want to speak to you.

SIDNEY. Yes. (SIDNEY *appears at the door.*)

RITCHIE. This is my new salesman, Mr. Forsyth, Miss Sidney.

SIDNEY. Oh !

(SIDNEY *and* EDGAR *stare at each other in amazement, and then* SIDNEY *goes back into the private office and slams the door.*)

RITCHIE. My lady typist is a very good worker but a trifle unceremonious. (*He knocks at the door.*) Miss Sidney, open the door.

SIDNEY. No, I shan't.

RITCHIE. But I want to come in.

SIDNEY. You can't.

RITCHIE. It 's my private office, it isn't yours.

(SIDNEY *opens the door and comes out.*)

RITCHIE. Let me see, I did introduce you.

EDGAR. Look here, Ritchie, what does this mean ?

RITCHIE. You had better call me ' Mr.' Ritchie when we are in the office. The lady typist prefers to be known as Miss Sidney.

EDGAR. How can you expect a fellow to work in the same office as his wife, especially after they 've had a row ?

RITCHIE. I don't want to know anything about the

private relations of my employees. There is no need to obtrude them into business hours.

EDGAR. Sidney, I am very sorry for this intrusion. Ritchie, you mean well, but I can't accept your situation.

RITCHIE. Excuse me, you gave me your word of honour to stop here for a month.

EDGAR. I forgot that.

SIDNEY. It doesn't matter, I will solve the difficulty. Mr. Ritchie, you had better find another typist, because I am going to leave to-day.

RITCHIE. You can't; you haven't given me notice.

SIDNEY. Is that necessary?

RITCHIE. Of course it is. You can give me notice next pay-day, and then you can leave a week on Saturday. If you leave before, I'll prosecute you.

SIDNEY. You can't.

RITCHIE. Certainly I can.

SIDNEY. Then it 's another example of the tyrannous laws made by men.

(*The telephone bell rings.*)

RITCHIE (*looking from one to the other*). Would one of you mind answering the telephone?

SIDNEY (*folding her arms and looking at* EDGAR). Let him.

EDGAR (*folding his arms*). I'm here to sell cars. She 's the lady typist.

SIDNEY. It 's not part of the lady typist's duty——

(*The bell rings again.*)

RITCHIE. Oh, don't trouble, I 'll answer it myself.

(*He goes to the telephone. They stand motionless.*)

RITCHIE. Hallo!—yes—very well. Don't show her

in just now. It wouldn't be safe. I 'll come out and see her. (*He replaces the receiver.*) By the way, Mr. Forsyth, *that* is the lady typist's desk (*pointing to the right desk*), and this one opposite is yours (*pointing to the left desk*).

(RITCHIE *goes out of the door on the left.*)

(SIDNEY *goes to her desk and sits down, taking up some loose papers.* EDGAR *thoughtfully follows her example and sits at his desk, facing her.*)

(SIDNEY, *feeling he is looking at her, raises her head, and they gaze at each other across the desk in silence for some time.*)

EDGAR. This is rather a ridiculous situation.

SIDNEY. Yes. I believe I could laugh if I weren't so angry with Mr. Ritchie. (*She angrily returns to her papers; there is a slight pause.*)

SIDNEY. What are you supposed to be here ?

EDGAR. I am a salesman.

SIDNEY. You are going to sell motor-cars ?

EDGAR. If I can manage it.

SIDNEY. I don't think you 'll have much difficulty. The principal duties of motor-car people seem to consist of hanging about the depôt with their hands in their pockets, smoking cigarettes.

(*A slight pause.*)

SIDNEY. How much a week are you getting ?

EDGAR. Thirty bob.

SIDNEY (*astonished*). Only thirty shillings !

EDGAR. Why ? How much are you getting ?

SIDNEY. Thirty-five.

EDGAR. Do you mean to say that you are getting more than I am ?

SIDNEY. Why not, if I 'm worth it ?

EDGAR. It 's scandalous.

SIDNEY. You 'd better ask for a rise.

EDGAR. I 've learnt something about wages lately, and I know that thirty-five shillings is more than most typists get.

SIDNEY (*excited*). Are you quite sure ?

EDGAR. Quite.

SIDNEY. What a liar that man is.

EDGAR. Ritchie ?

SIDNEY. Yes. He told me it was the usual amount. I 'll talk to him when he comes back.

EDGAR. So will I.

(*A slight pause.*)

EDGAR (*producing the postal orders*). By the way, I think these postal orders belong to you.

SIDNEY. No.

EDGAR. Twelve, for one pound each.

SIDNEY. I sent them to *you*.

EDGAR. It was very kind of you, but I don't want them.

SIDNEY. I 'm sure I don't.

EDGAR. Then we may as well get rid of them. (*He crosses to the windows, opens one, tosses the postal orders outside.* SIDNEY *has watched him, and she rises quickly.*)

SIDNEY. I think you are very cruel. (*She goes quickly into the private office to hide her feelings.*)

(*The left-hand door opens and* RITCHIE *enters with* JANE, *who is again gorgeously attired.*)

RITCHIE. This is the lady who called just now. When I told her you were here she insisted on coming to see you.

JANE. I should think so, indeed.

(EDGAR *shakes hands with* JANE.)

RITCHIE. Where is the lady typist ?

EDGAR. In the place where you lock her up.

RITCHIE. That won't do. She mustn't go in there.

(RITCHIE *enters the private office.*)

JANE. Mr. Edgar, Mr. Edgar, I *have* wanted to see you so.

EDGAR. Why didn't you come ? You knew our address.

JANE. Sidney wouldn't let me.

EDGAR. Sidney !

JANE. You 'll excuse the liberty, but she makes me call her Sidney, now.

EDGAR. Yes, that 's all right ; but what has she got to do with your coming to see us ?

JANE. She 's living with me now.

EDGAR. Living with you ?

JANE. Yes. Board and lodging, ten shillings a week.

EDGAR. Jane, how could you take the money from her ?

JANE. She wouldn't come unless I did, because she said it would be living on charity. And so I took it, because I knew she 'd have to pay a good deal more anywhere else. But I 'm putting all the money she pays me in the bank in her name. She doesn't know, poor lamb, but it 's there, all the same.

EDGAR. That 's very good of you, Jane.

JANE. And, oh, Mr. Edgar, can't you make it up with her ? I can't get to sleep at nights for thinking about the pair of you.

EDGAR. You don't understand, Jane.

JANE (*beginning to sob*). I think it 's you that don't understand, if you 'll excuse the liberty. (*Sobs.*) Sidney 's been living with me for three months come next Wednesday, and she 's got the sweetest temper in the world if you only let her have a bit of her own way.

EDGAR. Sidney could come back to me to-day, only she doesn't want to.

JANE. Not want to ! Poor lamb, she 's eating her heart out with wanting to. (*She sobs.*) I 've not been watching her these three months for nothing.

EDGAR. Are you quite certain ?

JANE. Don't believe it if you don't want to. But if her husband won't have her I 'll take care of her. So long as Jane Gregory has a bite or a sup the poor lamb shall share it with her. (*She is sobbing.*)

EDGAR. Jane, you 're a brick. (*He flings his arms round her neck and kisses her heartily. In the excitement of the moment* JANE'S *bonnet and hair become disarranged. At this precise moment* RITCHIE *and* SIDNEY *come out of the private office.*)

RITCHIE. I thought it was understood that the private relations of my employees were not to be obtruded into business hours.

JANE. Oh, Mr. Edgar, you have messed me up. Mr. Ritchie, I don't know what you 'll think of my character; I 'm ashamed to look you in the face.

(JANE *hastily goes out by the left-hand door.*)

RITCHIE. That 's not the way to treat customers, Mr. Forsyth.

EDGAR. Customers ?

RITCHIE. Certainly, Miss Gregory has come to buy

a car. Go after her at once, and don't let her leave the depôt. You are going to cost me more than you 're worth.

EDGAR. I 'm awfully sorry. (*He rushes out after* JANE.)

RITCHIE. Miss Sidney, you must understand once for all that you are not to use my private office. This is your room.

SIDNEY. I shall certainly refuse to work in a room where my husband is kissing other women.

RITCHIE. He will have to give a satisfactory explanation of his conduct.

SIDNEY. Very well. And I have another complaint to make.

RITCHIE. Let 's hear it. Be quick. (*He is at the left-hand door.*) I don't want to miss Jane.

SIDNEY. You are paying me more than the standard wage.

RITCHIE. My dear girl, if I *am* paying you liberally under the circumstances——

SIDNEY. I can't allow it. I insist on my wages being reduced.

RITCHIE. With pleasure. How little do you want ?

SIDNEY. The same as Edgar. Thirty shillings a week.

RITCHIE. But he gets a commission on any cars he sells.

SIDNEY. He didn't tell me that.

RITCHIE. Never mind, I 'll give you a commission on any you may sell.

SIDNEY. But I shan't sell any.

RITCHIE. Well, I dare say he won't, either.

(RITCHIE *goes out quickly, and* SIDNEY *sits at*

her desk; but almost at once RITCHIE *opens the door again, and shows in* MRS. FORSYTH, *dressed simply in ordinary mourning.*)

RITCHIE. Just excuse me a moment, I want to speak to a customer.

MRS. F. Certainly.

RITCHIE. Sit down. Shan't be long. (*He closes the door and vanishes.*)

(MRS. FORSYTH *goes to the fireplace, not noticing* SIDNEY, *who rises and watches her.*)

SIDNEY (*involuntarily*). Mother!

MRS. F. (*turning in surprise*). Sidney! What are you doing here?

SIDNEY. I work here.

MRS. F. Here?

(*There is a pause.*)

SIDNEY. Aren't you going to speak to me?

MRS. F. What do you expect me to say to you, Sidney?

SIDNEY. You *are* angry then?

MRS. F. You left my son.

SIDNEY. Because he wouldn't let me think for myself.

MRS. F. You were unreasonable. He would have met you half way.

SIDNEY. No, he wouldn't; and if he had made the offer I should have been wrong to accept it.

MRS. F. Wrong?

SIDNEY. A compromise is always wrong. It is a crime against one's self.

MRS. F. Do you think it is right to hurt people, then?

SIDNEY. Sometimes, for their own good. In what way did I hurt Edgar?

MRS. F. Can you ask ?

SIDNEY. He *did* feel it, then ?

MRS. F. Sidney, I have always prayed that Edgar's married life might be a happy one. My own, you may have guessed, was not happy.

SIDNEY. Yet, you and your husband never quarrelled. You accepted his views.

MRS. F. They were my own views too. We simply lost interest in each other. Now, although Edgar and you have often quarrelled, Edgar has never lost interest in you.

SIDNEY. Are you certain of that ?

MRS. F. Do you think I don't know my son ? I have had no one else to love during the greater part of my life. Since you left us Edgar has been miserable ; and it is for causing him so much suffering that I feel it difficult to forgive you.

SIDNEY (*with some emotion*). I 'm very glad you 've told me this—very glad. I—I— (*Her lip quivers ; she is on the point of breaking down when the door opens and* RITCHIE *appears. Seeing him,* SIDNEY *quickly turns and goes into the private office, ashamed to let* RITCHIE *see a tear in her eye.*)

RITCHIE (*looking after* SIDNEY *curiously*). What have you been saying to my lady typist ?

MRS. F. I hope I haven't been cruel.

RITCHIE. It was rather a surprise to find her here ?

MRS. F. I might have guessed that your kindness——

RITCHIE. Kindness be hanged ! I 'm not a charitable institution. She 's a worker ; she 's worth her salary. I only hope I shall find that your son earns his as thoroughly.

MRS. F. (*eagerly*). Edgar ?

RITCHIE. I 've just found him a situation.

MRS. F. (*brokenly*). I—I don't know how to thank you.

RITCHIE (*quietly*). There 's always one way you can thank me.

MRS. F. One way ?

RITCHIE. Yes. (*He looks intently at her; and she, after a look at him, turns her head away.*) But I 'm not going to press that for a while. I must give you time to reflect whether an unpolished fellow like I am——

MRS. F. (*stopping him*). Don't say any more just now. I must have time to think; but be sure that the question of polish, as you call it (*she smiles*), will not have anything to do with my decision.

(*The left-hand door opens and* JANE *and* EDGAR *come in.*)

RITCHIE. Well, did you show Miss Gregory that car ?

EDGAR. Yes.

JANE. I 've only one thing to say about it. I don't like the colour it 's painted.

RITCHIE. You can have it any colour you like.

JANE. Something bright and cheerful, yet refined.

RITCHIE. Neat, yet gaudy. Well, Edgar shall take you for a trial run to-morrow, if that will suit you.

JANE. I 'm much obliged. Good-bye, Mr. Edgar.

EDGAR. See you to-morrow, Jane.

MRS. F. I must go too. Are you coming, Edgar ?

EDGAR. Not just at present, mother.

RITCHIE. I 'll see you off the premises.

JANE (*to* MRS. FORSYTH). We might have a taxi to the Square, and get some tea at Barker's.

(JANE *and* MRS. FORSYTH *go out.* RITCHIE *stops behind for an instant, produces some slips of paper from his pocket, and hands them to* EDGAR.)

RITCHIE. By the way, I found a lot of postal orders in the yard. Do you know anything about them ?

(RITCHIE *goes out.*)

EDGAR (*examining them, calling after him*). There are only eleven ! Where 's the other ?

(*While he is counting them again,* SIDNEY *comes out of the private office and watches him.* EDGAR *sees her and is confused. Then he ostentatiously folds up the postal orders and puts them in his pocket.*)

EDGAR. I 'm going to keep these now. Thank you very much for sending them.

SIDNEY. I am very glad you went out and picked them up.

EDGAR. I didn't, as a matter of fact. But there 's one missing, and I 'll go and look for that when I 've finished talking to you.

SIDNEY. What—what do you wish to say to me ?

EDGAR. I wish to ask you to come and live with me again.

SIDNEY (*with a movement of pleasure*). Edgar ! (*Then quietly.*) Do you remember that I made one condition about coming back ? I am to have perfect freedom to think for myself.

EDGAR. Yes, I agree to that. I have had plenty of

time to reflect during the last three months. We 'll both think for ourselves in future.

SIDNEY. That 's right. One has got to be absolutely free.

EDGAR. You shall be.

SIDNEY. I 'm very glad.

EDGAR. Sidney, it 's not only I who have altered; things are different too.

SIDNEY. Yes. The life we 're going to lead won't be anything like so empty as life in the Brook Bank days. Certainly the future is promising enough.

EDGAR. You mean that we shall both have our new work to do?

SIDNEY. To some extent, but I meant something else as well. *You* will have *your* work, of course.

EDGAR. Why, you don't intend to give up yours?

SIDNEY. Has it never struck you that there is a time when a woman is forced to abandon the duty of earning her living because she has another duty to perform?

EDGAR. Another duty? (*Reflecting.*) Yes, I see.

SIDNEY (*looking straight in front of her.*) I have realised that just lately. (*She looks at him.*) Edgar, don't you understand?

EDGAR (*a light breaking upon him*). Sidney, do you mean that *you*—you——?

SIDNEY. Yes. (*She goes to* EDGAR *and quietly puts her arm round his neck.*) I 'm so glad you asked me to come back to you to-day; if you hadn't, I believe I should have asked you to take me back. (*He kisses her.*) Now don't you think the future is full of promise?

(*They remain motionless.* RITCHIE *opens the door from the depôt, and seeing them together, stops and contemplates them, a smile gradually broadening on his face. Then he retires and noiselessly closes the door after him.*)

The CURTAIN *falls.*

MARRIAGES IN THE MAKING

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

'The love-season is the carnival of egoism, and it brings the touchstone to our natures.'—MEREDITH, *The Egoist.*

CHARACTERS

Mrs. Cartwright (*a Widow*).

Dolly Cartwright (*Mrs. Cartwright's Daughter*).

Mrs. Amore (*a Widow*).

Clarence Amore (*Mrs. Amore's Son*).

Rev. Austen Fenny (*Rector of Wraysford*).

Violet Fenny (*Mr. Fenny's Daughter*).

Gordon Leigh.

Mrs. Scattergood (*Widow of the late Rector*).

A Parlourmaid.

SCENES

ACT I.—MRS. CARTWRIGHT'S *Drawing-room. Friday afternoon.*

ACT II.—MRS. CARTWRIGHT'S *Drawing-room. Saturday morning.*

ACT III.—*A corner of the Garden at* MRS. AMORE'S, *adjoining the Wraysford Cricket Ground. Saturday afternoon.*

(*The play takes place in glorious June weather, in an atmosphere of sun and flowers and colour and summer frocks.*)

MARRIAGES IN THE MAKING

ACT I

The triangular scene represents part of Mrs. Cartwright's *drawing-room, a pleasantly but not too expensively furnished modern apartment. The one visible corner of the room is rather to the right of the spectator, and from it the longer left-hand wall and the shorter right-hand one run obliquely across the stage to the left and right sides of the proscenium respectively. The middle of the left-hand wall is occupied by the fireplace, which, as it is an intensely hot day in June, is now occupied by a bank of flowers and ferns. On each side of the fireplace is a window, flung wide open to admit the afternoon breeze. Each of these windows is fitted with a low comfortable window seat. The door is about the middle of the right-hand wall, and just above it, with its narrow end to the spectator, is a grand-piano. The keys and the piano stool are thus hidden from view. The centre of the room is occupied by a great padded settee with very low back and sides; on its left is a small occasional table with Mrs. Humphry Ward's latest novel lying open face downwards upon it. On the extreme left, near the wall, is a small table bearing silver ornaments, with a chair by it; and on the extreme right, below the door, a pretty little writing-desk furnished with writing materials and having a chair conveniently handy. The room is*

decorated in light and delicate shades, a few Turner engravings in plain black frames and water-colours in gilt frames adorn the walls. There are plenty of flowers.

Through the windows one sees a fairly large garden, and catches glimpses of the houses on the other side of the road.

MRS. CARTWRIGHT, *a decided, capable, good-looking, unscrupulous woman of middle age, is lying on the settee enjoying her afternoon nap. On the seat of the lower window* DOLLY CARTWRIGHT *is curled up reading a pocket edition of Meredith's 'The Egoist.' She is a perfectly frank and unsentimental modern girl, fair, and extremely good-looking; hockey, swimming, and lawn tennis have made her physically a fine specimen of her sex.*

MRS. CARTWRIGHT *suddenly opens her eyes, yawns unaffectedly, stretches herself, and reaches out her hand for the novel on the table near her.*

MRS. C. (*finding her place in the novel*). What time is it, Dolly ?

(DOLLY, *absorbed in her book, does not answer.*)

Dolly.

(*There is still no answer, and* MRS. CARTWRIGHT *raises herself on her elbow and looks round.*)

Dolly, didn't you hear me ask what time it is ?

DOLLY. Sorry, mother, didn't hear you. It 's just struck four.

MRS. C. (*suspiciously*). What are you reading ?

DOLLY. George Meredith: *The Egoist.*

MRS. C. (*relieved*). Oh, Meredith ! I never can make

his people out. They don't talk like human beings.

DOLLY. Don't you think that some of them are very like the people we meet, anyhow?

MRS. C. Oh, I dare say! (*She yawns.*) I should like some tea.

DOLLY. Shall I ring for it?

MRS. C. Hadn't we better wait for Clarence?

DOLLY. If you like.

MRS. C. What time is he coming?

DOLLY. I don't know.

MRS. C. (*surprised*). You don't know! I suppose he *is* coming?

DOLLY. I suppose so.

MRS. C. (*indignantly*). My goodness, Dolly, when *I* was engaged I used to know what time your father was coming, and if he *didn't*, I took care to know the reason why.

(MRS. C. *settles herself to her novel, and there is a slight pause.*)

DOLLY (*at length*). Mother, were you ever in love with father?

MRS. C. (*scandalised*). Dolly, what a question to ask!

DOLLY. Well, but were you?

MRS. C. Of course. Didn't I marry him?

DOLLY. Yes. But did you decide to marry him because you were in love with him, or decide you were in love with him because you were going to marry him?

MRS. C. (*nonplussed*). Really, Dolly—how can you expect me to remember a thing like that after all these years?

DOLLY. If *you* can't tell whether you 've been in love after it 's all over, how can you expect me to tell whether I 'm in love with Clarence now ?

MRS. C. Don't talk such nonsense. You must know that, or you wouldn't have got engaged to him.

DOLLY. I think sometimes that you had more to do with our engagement than I had. (*Abruptly.*) What is love, exactly, in your opinion ?

MRS. C. Dolly, you are positively indecent at times. It 's a—well, it 's a sort of attraction. Clarence attracted you, and you fell in love with him.

DOLLY. But Gordon Leigh attracted me before he went to India, and you said that was only a flirtation.

MRS. C. Gordon Leigh hadn't a penny in the world.

DOLLY. I don't see what that 's got to do with it.

MRS. C. You 'd have found out fast enough if I 'd let you marry him. (*Settling down to her book.*) I want to read. Do shut up and be serious.

DOLLY. I am serious. I 'm seriously wondering whether I love Clarence.

MRS. C. (*alarmed*). Dolly, are you mad ? (*She shuts her novel and rises to a sitting position on the settee simultaneously.*) Why, we 've fixed the wedding day !

DOLLY. Yes, it 's quite time to be finding out, isn't it ?

MRS. C. (*decidedly*). You 've been quarrelling with Clarence.

DOLLY. No, I haven't.

MRS. C. You must have been. It 's the only explanation.

DOLLY. I tell you—oh, well, if you 've made up your

mind it's no use contradicting you! But you can ask him when he comes.

MRS. C. (*cross-examining*). Do you mean to say you don't like Clarence?

DOLLY. I like him very much.

MRS. C. Very well, then, what on earth— (*She raises her hands in mute amazement.*)

DOLLY. I 've been thinking about his character lately.

MRS. C. My dear girl, if you are going to be particular about men's characters you 'll die an old maid.

DOLLY. He thinks too much of himself.

MRS. C. In my experience, all husbands do.

DOLLY. You 've only had one yourself.

MRS. C. I 've studied other people's, though. You may protest as much as you like, Dolly, but it is obvious that there is a perfectly simple explanation of this extraordinary attitude of yours.

DOLLY. My dear mother, I 'm on entirely good terms with Clarence. We have *not* quarrelled—not yet.

MRS. C. Not yet! Are you going to?

DOLLY (*coolly*). I shouldn't be surprised.

(MRS. CARTWRIGHT *stares at* DOLLY, *and then with an angry snort she raises her eyes to the ceiling in mute despair.*)

(*Glancing out of the window.*) Clarence is coming now. (*She waves her hand and smiles.*)

MRS. C. Now do behave yourself and mind what you say to him.

(DOLLY *throws her book down with a bang, jumps up, and runs to the door.*)

MRS. C. (*rising in alarm*). Dolly, what are you going to do?

DOLLY. Open the front door. (DOLLY *goes out.*)

MRS. C. Dolly, come back, do you hear ?

(DOLLY, *however, has gone, and* MRS. C., *with a gesture of annoyance, rises and crosses to the mantelpiece and looks at herself. Almost at once* DOLLY *and* CLARENCE, *the latter a tall, stiff, clean-shaven young man of about twenty-seven, appear at the lower window and leaning on the sill watch* MRS. C. MRS. C. *glances round at the door, and then hastily adjusts and touches up her hair, which has become slightly disordered during her nap.* DOLLY *laughs merrily.*)

Dolly, how you startled me ! (*Going to the window.*) Good afternoon, Clarence. (*Rather sharply.*) I wish you 'd let Mary open the front door, Dolly. What do you think we pay the servants for ?

CLARENCE. Good afternoon, Mrs. Cartwright. Mother is driving round here this afternoon to see you.

MRS. C. I 'm so pleased. But aren't you coming in ?

CLARENCE. If you don't mind, we 'll stroll round the garden a little first.

DOLLY. The truth is, Clarence passed Mrs. Scattergood coming here to call on you, and he can't stand her at any price.

MRS. C. I don't blame him. She 's a detestable old gossip. You know, Dolly, I 've always suspected that it was Mrs. Scattergood who started that rumour about me and old Mr. Featherstone last year. And he is over seventy, too.

CLARENCE. I hate to judge anybody harshly, but I always regret that the ducking-stool is abolished whenever I meet Mrs. Scattergood. (*He looks*

round.) She's coming into the garden now. (*Bowing and smiling.*) How do you do, Mrs. Scattergood ?

DOLLY (*also smiling*). Good afternoon.

CLARENCE. Come along, Dorothy. (*They disappear.*)

MRS. C. It 's too bad of you to desert me like this.

(*She crosses to the door, and opening it, stands in the doorway to greet* MRS. SCATTERGOOD *as the* MAID *opens the door.* MRS. SCATTERGOOD *is the widow of the late rector, a pleasantly ugly woman, voluble and gossipy, wearing handsome black clothes, not widow's weeds.*)

Good afternoon ; isn't it hot ?

MRS. S. So pleased to find you at home. (*They kiss.*) I call it oppressive.

MRS. C. (*indicating the arm-chair on the left*). Sit here.

MRS. S. Oh, what a relief ! I caught a glimpse of Dolly and Clarence Amore as I entered the garden.

MRS. C. (*sitting on the settee*). Yes. Dolly wanted to come in when she saw you, but I wouldn't let her. I said, 'No, I must have a cosy little chat with Mrs. Scattergood first.'

MRS. S. Young girls *are* in the way sometimes. One has to avoid the most interesting topics.

MRS. C. I don't know ; nowadays girls are very well informed.

MRS. S. But still, my dear, there is such a thing as indelicacy. No one knows that better than myself.

MRS. C. I should think not.

MRS. S. In a village like Wraysford there is such a temptation for people to pry into one another's

affairs. By the way, I see Gordon Leigh is back from India. I suppose he must have been dismissed from his situation. I never expected him to make anything.

MRS. C. He has not been here yet. We used to see a lot of him.

MRS. S. Ashamed of himself, perhaps. Let me see, at one time he and—er—Dolly—er——

MRS. C. No. Certainly not.

MRS. S. Well, of course I always denied it, but there was a good deal of gossip in the village. Mr. Seattergood—he was alive then—he used to say that Dolly and Gordon Leigh were made for each other.

MRS. C. Perfectly preposterous ! I beg your pardon ; I mean it was the merest flirtation.

MRS. S. So I always maintained.

MRS. C. That was before Dolly met Clarence.

MRS. S. Yes, in those days Clarence was rather fond of Violet Fenny.

MRS. C. Violet Fenny ! You must be mistaken. Could a man like Clarence ever be attracted by an insipid little creature like Violet Fenny ?

MRS. S. It seems incredible, does it not ? But Violet, I know, admired him immensely. That was before Mr. Fenny got the living, when he was my husband's curate. Clarence used to read with him during his vacations, and so of course he saw a good deal of Violet.

MRS. C. I am afraid you must have been listening to ill-natured rumours.

MRS. S. No. I made a good many inquiries myself, I assure you. But you mustn't be annoyed.

MRS. C. (*superciliously*). Annoyed !

MRS. S. Remember all that was long before Clarence met Dolly.

(*The* PARLOURMAID *opens the door and announces* 'Mrs. Amore.' MRS. AMORE *enters. She is a faded little, fragile, Dresden China lady, beautifully dressed in lavender, without any strong will or purpose of her own.* CLARENCE, *as a matter of fact, has dominated her for some years.* MRS. C. *rises to receive her.*)

MRS. C. My dear Mrs. Amore, so pleased to see you. (*To the* MAID.) Bring tea at once, and let Miss Dolly know ; she is in the garden.

(*The* MAID *goes out.*)

MRS. S. So brave of you to venture out in this hot weather.

MRS. A. (*feebly*). I find it trying, but Clarence reminded me that I owe you a call, Mrs. Cartwright, so of course I made the effort.

MRS. C. It is kind of you ; in your delicate health.

(MRS. C. *indicates the settee to* MRS. AMORE, *who sits in the right-hand corner of it.*)

(*The* MAID *brings in a cake-stand and a tea-cloth. The latter she spreads on the table by the settee, and the former she places near the table. She then goes out.*)

MRS. A. Clarence is here already, is he not ?

MRS. S. Doesn't he get tired of having nothing to do all day except loaf about here ?

MRS. C. Loaf ?

MRS. S. Just now he 's here on business, one might almost call it, but after Dolly and he are married ?

MRS. C. He will have his duties as a landed proprietor.

MRS. A. I hardly think Clarence will be satisfied to remain merely a country gentleman. But I really know nothing definitely; he doesn't ask my advice; he simply tells me what he has decided when his mind is made up.

(*The* MAID *enters with the tea-tray, which she places on the table near the settee. She then goes out.* MRS. C. *begins to pour out five cups of tea.*)

MRS. S. Nothing has been mentioned?

MRS. A. There has been a suggestion that he should enter Parliament; and really, I don't see what else there is for him to do.

MRS. S. As a Conservative, I suppose?

MRS. A. I 'm afraid I don't know. I should have liked him to stand as a Conservative, but I have some idea he may prefer the Liberal party. He is so advanced, you know.

MRS. C. It doesn't matter which he is so long as he gets in.

MRS. S. There isn 't very much difference, after all.

MRS. A. Certainly they are both respectable parties, which is saying something nowadays. The only objection that I can see to a political career is Clarence's sensitiveness to public opinion. His hatred of criticism or ridicule would naturally cause him to shrink from the violence of a contested election. Really, I think Clarence ought to have been a peer. The atmosphere of the House of Lords would be congenial to him, I feel sure.

(DOLLY *and* CLARENCE *come into the room.*)

MRS. C. Ah, here they are! Will you give Mrs. Scattergood her tea, Clarence?

(CLARENCE *takes the cup to* MRS. S. *and hands the cake-stand.* MRS. S. *takes a piece of cake and devours it immediately.*)

(DOLLY *goes to* MRS. A. *and kisses her.*)

MRS. A. How are you, my dear Dorothy?

(DOLLY *goes to the lower window seat, speaking and smiling to* MRS. S. *as she passes.*)

DOLLY. I 've seen you already, Mrs. Scattergood.

(MRS. C. *gives* MRS. A. *a cup of tea.* CLARENCE *offers cake, but* MRS. A. *refuses.*)

MRS. A. Nothing to eat, thank you.

MRS. C. Is there some bread and butter? Oh yes! (*She takes a piece.*) Here is Dolly's tea, and here is yours.

(CLARENCE *takes* DOLLY'S *tea and offers cake.* DOLLY *takes a piece.*)

CLARENCE. You will be in a draught by the window, Dorothy. I should prefer you to sit somewhere else.

DOLLY. Oh, I like it, thanks!

(CLARENCE, *slightly annoyed, comes and takes his tea and returns to* DOLLY.)

MRS. S. I notice you and Clarence always call Dolly 'Dorothy,' Mrs. Amore.

MRS. A. Er—yes. Personally I think Dolly rather a pretty name, but Clarence prefers 'Dorothy,' and wishes me to use it.

CLARENCE. The abbreviation 'Dolly' seems to be suitable enough for a child, but I should not care for my wife to be called by it.

MRS. S. Indeed! Might I have another piece of cake?

CLARENCE (*passing the cake-stand*). Certainly. Mrs. Cartwright hasn't quite got used to the change yet. (*He replaces the cake-stand after* MRS. S. *has taken a piece.*)

MRS. C. When she 's your wife I 'll try and remember, Clarence; it 's too much trouble now.

DOLLY. Oh, good gracious! I hope I 'm not going to be 'Dorothy' all my life.

CLARENCE. Not if I wish it? (*He pats her shoulder kindly.*)

DOLLY (*shrugging her shoulders*). Oh, if you wish it, I suppose——

MRS. S. How delicious that tea was!

MRS. C. Let me give you a little more.

MRS. S. Thank you. Do you mind, Clarence?

(CLARENCE *takes her cup for more tea.*)

MRS. A. And what is the latest news about the Floral Fête, Mrs. Scattergood? You know we have promised to lend the grounds of Bollin Hall for it.

MRS. S. Good gracious, that reminds me! I 'd nearly forgotten to tell you. What do you think Mr. Fenny wishes to do now?

DOLLY. }
MRS. C. } What?

MRS. A. I haven't heard.

MRS. S. He wishes to have a pastoral play at the Floral Fête.

MRS. A. A pastoral play! What is that? Something out of the Bible?

CLARENCE. A pastoral play, my dear mother, is a

play performed out of doors, with natural scenery.

MRS. A. That *will* be nice. There 's a good place at the bottom of the croquet lawn.

MRS. S. Then you don't disapprove of the idea? A stage play, you know.

MRS. A. I suppose it will be all right if it has passed the Censor.

MRS. C. What play does the Rector suggest?

MRS. S. Scenes from *As You Like It*, by Shakespeare.

MRS. A. Surely there cannot be anything to object to in Shakespeare?

MRS. S. Have you ever read him? I was glancing through a volume of his works this morning and I came across some passages— (*She raises her eyebrows.*)

CLARENCE. Those are usually omitted, I believe, as are certain portions of the Bible. They were both written for a grosser age than ours.

MRS. S. Ahem! May I trouble you for another piece of cake?

CLARENCE (*passing it*). With pleasure. Shall I leave it near you?

MRS. S. Thank you. Then you will not object to Dolly's taking a part in the performance?

DOLLY. Me!

(*There is general surprise.* DOLLY *jumps off the window seat.*)

MRS. S. The Rector mentioned it.

DOLLY. What part?

MRS. S. It was called Rosalind, I believe.

DOLLY. Oh!

MRS. A. Is that a good part?

MRS. S. Mr. Fenny said it was fairly prominent.

DOLLY. Why, it 's the best part in the whole play! I shall just love to take it.

MRS. S. And Violet Fenny is to take a part called Celia.

DOLLY. How jolly! (DOLLY *crosses to the arm-chair on the right and sits.*)

CLARENCE (*anxiously*). What about the men? Did the Rector suggest me at all?

MRS. S. He thought that you would hardly care to act, but he suggested that as Dolly would be in it you might like to be one of the Chorus of Foresters.

CLARENCE. Chorus! It isn't a Musical Comedy!

DOLLY. You don't have Choruses in Shakespeare.

MRS. A. I think there is a Chorus in *Henry V.*

CLARENCE. My dear mother, that is quite another thing. (*Annoyed.*) The Rector ought to have consulted me before arranging everything like this.

MRS. C. You know you have only got to speak to him to have any part you want, Clarence.

MRS. A. Suppose you call and see him this afternoon?

CLARENCE. Most decidedly not. I shall have nothing at all to do with it.

MRS. A. Don't be unkind, Clarence. We don't want it to be a failure.

CLARENCE. That will be the Rector's lookout. If he chooses to act on his own responsibility he must take the consequences.

DOLLY. But, Clarence, to please me. I shall be in it, you know.

CLARENCE. My dear Dolly, after this—oh, never

mind now! I will speak to you later about it. (*To* Mrs. S. *abruptly.*) Will you have any more tea ?

Mrs. S. I will, if you please. (Clarence *takes her cup for more.*)

Mrs. C. Any one else more tea ?

(*There is a murmur of* 'No, thank you.')

Mrs. S. As I was saying I looked at *As You Like It* this morning, and was considerably surprised to find that Rosalind pretends to be a man in it.

Dolly. Yes. That 's the best part about it.

Mrs. S. Have you considered the dress ?

Mrs. C. We can hire it, I suppose.

Mrs. S. But, my dear Mrs. Cartwright, you don't understand. Dolly would have to appear without her—that is— She would have to wear—er—ahem——

Clarence (*rather sharply*). Your tea. (*He turns on his heel and goes straight up to the second window and looks out of it.*)

Mrs. A. What did they wear in those days ?

Dolly. Some sort of tights, I think.

Mrs. S. (*scandalised*). Tights! (*There is a pause.* Mrs. S. *drinks her tea in one draught, puts the cup down, and rises.*) I must really be going, Mrs. Cartwright.

Mrs. C. Won't you have any more tea ?

Mrs. S. Nothing, thank you.

Mrs. A. I am going too. Let me drive you home ?

Mrs. S. I shall be very grateful.

Mrs. A. You are stopping, Clarence, I suppose ?

Clarence (*turning round*). Yes, mother. (*He opens the door for them.*)

MRS. A. Good-bye, Dorothy. I have no doubt that the Rector will not wish you to wear anything of an objectionable nature.

MRS. S. It is so difficult to be certain of anything where Mr. Fenny is concerned. Good-bye, Dolly. Good afternoon, Clarence.

(MRS. AMORE, MRS. SCATTERGOOD, *and* MRS. CARTWRIGHT *go out.* CLARENCE *shuts the door.* DOLLY *goes to the settee and sits there.* CLARENCE *wanders up to the back of the room and then comes behind the settee.*)

CLARENCE. I hope I behaved like a gentleman, Dorothy.

DOLLY. Of course, dear, you always do. That is perhaps your gravest fault.

CLARENCE. Don't trifle with me, dearest. How thankful I shall be to get away from this narrow, inquisitive Wraysford society and its gossiping Mrs. Scattergoods.

DOLLY. You are so terribly sensitive, Clarence. In a little place like Wraysford people must talk about each other a good deal.

CLARENCE. I have no objection to their talking about each other so long as they don't talk about me. You haven't lived here very long. You don't quite realise what it 's like, Dorothy. A man can't dance more than twice in an evening with a girl without causing the tongues of all these old women to start wagging. I have suffered more than any one else from that sort of thing.

DOLLY. Why you, especially ?

CLARENCE (*hesitating*). Well, I suppose——

DOLLY. Oh, I see! Because you are the owner of Bollin Hall?

CLARENCE (*shocked*). I should have thought that you, at least, would not assume that to be the only reason.

DOLLY. Still, Clarence, when one is the richest unmarried man in the neighbourhood one must expect to be talked about.

CLARENCE. Then we will hope that the chattering will cease when I am married. (*Tenderly.*) When *we* are married, Dorothy. (*He sits by her.*)

DOLLY. That will depend on how you behave yourself.

CLARENCE (*reproachfully*). Dorothy! Do you suggest that there will be anything to reproach me with?

DOLLY. No, no. I 'm sure you 'll be perfect, flawless. You will be such a faultless husband that I shan't want to use you for everyday. I shall want to keep you in a cabinet in the drawing-room like the best china.

CLARENCE. I don't like you to jest about a subject that is sacred to me.

DOLLY (*innocently*). You mean yourself?

CLARENCE. No, our marriage. That is sacred to me.

DOLLY. Isn't that rather a serious view to take about what is after all quite a common circumstance? Marriages happen every day.

CLARENCE. Not marriages like ours. Ours was made in Heaven.

DOLLY. You think so? (*She rises and goes to the window.*) Suppose it didn't take place?

CLARENCE. I can't suppose what is unthinkable.

(DOLLY *remains with her back to him.*)

(*Alarmed.*) Dorothy, what is the matter? Why, I believe you 've been afraid.

DOLLY. Afraid! Of what? (*She turns quickly.*)

CLARENCE. Afraid that I had changed.

DOLLY. No, I haven't been afraid of that.

CLARENCE (*relieved*). Of course not. How could I think so? Never doubt the strength of my love for you, Dorothy. To me it is more than sacred, it is holy.

(DOLLY *sighs deeply, and slowly returns to the settee and sits by* CLARENCE.)

CLARENCE. I think, Dorothy, perhaps *I* had better see the Rector about this performance of *As You Like It.*

DOLLY. About a part for yourself?

CLARENCE. Good heavens, no! I don't want a part. I don't want to make a fool of myself in public.

DOLLY. Then what about?

CLARENCE. To tell him that *you* don't intend to take part.

DOLLY (*amazed*). But I do intend to take part.

CLARENCE. My dear Dorothy!

DOLLY. You don't mean to say you wish me to refuse to play Rosalind?

CLARENCE. I 'm afraid you don't look at this matter in quite the right way, Dorothy. I am thinking of yourself.

DOLLY. So am I, if it comes to that. I shall enjoy it.

CLARENCE. In other words, you have a purely selfish reason. Is that quite fair to me? Shouldn't *you* think of *me*?

DOLLY. Ah, now then! I thought you weren't thinking *entirely* of me.

CLARENCE. I had hoped your natural delicacy would have made you shrink from the idea of being kissed by any other man but me.

DOLLY. But it would be in public.

CLARENCE. That makes it worse.

DOLLY. I mean that you would be there, watching.

CLARENCE (*rising excitedly*). Worse, worse than ever! But, Dorothy, that wouldn't be the very worst. Worst of all would be—be——

DOLLY. What?

CLARENCE. Simply what that detestable Mrs. Scattergood was hinting at. Wearing a man's costume.

DOLLY. I should wear a very becoming one. Every one knows that I 've got legs.

CLARENCE. That 's no reason why you should give all the Mrs. Scattergoods in the village the chance of seeing them.

DOLLY. What would it matter? A pack of old women!

CLARENCE (*wildly*). A pack of young men! That 's why it would matter.

DOLLY. Oh!

(*There is a slight pause.* CLARENCE *becomes calmer and he sits down again by* DOLLY.)

CLARENCE. Forgive me, dear, if I spoke too strongly. I am sure you will consent to be guided by me, when you realise how deeply I feel about this matter.

DOLLY. But, Clarence, if there *is* any criticism from absurd people with narrow minds, it is I who will be criticised, not you.

CLARENCE. I shall feel it as much as you. Remember you are to be my wife.

DOLLY. Your wife! Your wife! You keep repeating that. What will our life be like? What does it mean when you say that I shall be your wife?

CLARENCE (*speaking very kindly*). You will be the mistress and the ornament of my house. You will work for me at elections, and help me to get in to Parliament. (*Oratorically.*) And then, when I am making a name for myself, you will stimulate me; I shall come to you for consolation in my defeats, and for inspiration to spur me on to my triumphs. That 's what our life will be like.

DOLLY. I see. (*A pause.*) And where do I come in?

CLARENCE (*discouraged*). I thought I had just told you that, Dorothy. (*In an aggrieved tone.*) You don't— You don't seem to respond to me to-day.

DOLLY. Perhaps I want a holiday.

CLARENCE. Are you not feeling well?

DOLLY. I fancy it 's something on my nerves.

CLARENCE. The hot weather, possibly. I have noticed, dearest, that you have not been quite yourself recently.

DOLLY. You have noticed a change in me?

CLARENCE. Yes. You have been singularly unwilling to fall in with my suggestions of late.

DOLLY. I 'm sorry, Clarence; but — why should I always do just what you want?

CLARENCE. I don't think that I ever ask anything unreasonable?

(*A pause.* DOLLY *does not reply.*)

Now about this play, for instance.

DOLLY. I am most anxious to take part in it.

CLARENCE. A little reflection will convince you that my view is the right one.

DOLLY (*passionately*). Oh, let me do the wrong thing for once, then!

CLARENCE (*shocked*). Dorothy, I 'm surprised at you. (*He rises.*)

DOLLY (*rising*). I beg you to let me act in this play, Clarence.

CLARENCE. You will not do so with my consent.

DOLLY. Then, Clarence, I shall do so without your consent.

(*A slight pause.* CLARENCE *quietly takes her hand between his hands.*)

CLARENCE (*kindly*). You are overwrought to-day, dear; it is the heat.

DOLLY (*breaking away*). No, I won't be talked to like that, as if I were a naughty child, and you a schoolmaster.

CLARENCE (*firmly*). Dorothy, listen to me. I wish you to promise to give up all thought of this performance.

DOLLY. You are simply piqued because the Rector has arranged the play without consulting you, and because he hasn't offered you a part in it. That is why you don't want me to have anything to do with it. I won't give you my promise.

(*She goes away from him, and stands with her back to him by the lower window. He watches her and then turns and goes to the door.*)

CLARENCE. We won't talk about this any more just now. I shall be round in the morning.

DOLLY. Are you going ?

CLARENCE. Yes.

(*There is a slight hesitation, and then they cross to meet each other in front of the settee, and* CLARENCE *kisses her reverently.*)

CLARENCE. And I hope that you will be more reasonable in the morning, Dorothy.

DOLLY. Clarence, won't you—just for once—won't *you* change your mind ?

CLARENCE. I never change my mind. (*Genially.*) That is a woman's privilege.

DOLLY. Thank Heaven I 'm a woman then ! You 'll find your attitude terribly hard to live up to.

CLARENCE. Everything that is worth doing is hard. (*He goes to the door.*) Good-bye, dear.

DOLLY. Good-bye.

CLARENCE. Go to bed early to-night; you will feel better in the morning.

(CLARENCE *goes out.* DOLLY *sinks on the settee, thinking. Only a few seconds have passed, however, when a young man, tall and athletic, with a very sun-burned handsome face and a fine dark moustache leans on the sill of the lower window and looks into the room. Seeing* DOLLY, *he gives a start of satisfaction and whistles softly. No notice is taken, so he calls gently,* 'Dolly.')

DOLLY (*turning suddenly, and looking at him*). Why ! It 's Gordon Leigh.

GORDON (*grinning*). Yes.

(DOLLY *jumps up quickly and runs to the window. Her manner at once becomes*

frank and unrestrained, in marked contrast to her attitude towards CLARENCE.)

DOLLY. Oh, Gordon, I *am* so glad to see you! How your moustache has grown!

GORDON. Yes. I 'm rather proud of it.

DOLLY. Do come in. Go round to the front door, I 'll let you in. Oh! (*She suddenly stops and looks at the door, remembering that* CLARENCE *has only just left the room.*)

GORDON. Don't trouble. I 'll come in the old way, if you don't mind. I 've done it many a time before.

(*Lifting a long leg over the sill, he hoists himself on to the window seat and enters the room.*)

DOLLY (*relieved*). Yes, that will be better. Now come and sit here and tell me all about yourself. I thought you were still in India. (*They sit on the settee.*)

GORDON. Got back last night on a six months' holiday. I 've been there three years, you know.

DOLLY. Is it really only three years since you went?

GORDON. Only three years! To me it seems like ten.

DOLLY. Oh! (*She is suddenly confused by the ardent gaze with which he accompanies this remark.*) I suppose you 've had a good time in India? I understand that men who go out there on business spend most of their time in playing tennis and drinking iced lemonade.

GORDON. A pretty good time. Not as good as we used to have here. You remember?

DOLLY. Yes; we used to have some fun, sometimes.

GORDON. Have you still got that old punt on the

river? Do you remember the day you fell overboard?

DOLLY. And you rescued me?

GORDON. You can hardly call it that. It was only two feet deep.

DOLLY. Well, you lugged me out.

GORDON. Yes, and you were a weight, too. Do you remember when you broke the hammock that hung between the apple-trees in the orchard?

DOLLY. That wasn't my fault. That was because we both got in at once.

GORDON. Of course. And you fell underneath.

DOLLY. Yes. I thought *you* were a weight then.

GORDON. I say, Dolly——

DOLLY (*pleased*). 'Dolly.'

GORDON. I suppose I can call you Dolly still?

DOLLY. Of course. For Heaven's sake don't call me 'Dorothy.'

GORDON. Shouldn't think of it. 'Dorothy's' too beastly prim.

DOLLY. I'm glad you think that. I mean—er—(*Confused.*) Go on.

GORDON. Let's go on the river again to-morrow.

DOLLY. I should love to. (*Recollecting herself.*) Oh, but I—I may be engaged! No, really, I don't think I ought to.

GORDON. Never mind your engagement. Throw it up and come with me.

DOLLY. Throw up my engagement! I don't think it would be fair to do that.

GORDON. It can't be very important. Nothing important ever happens at Wraysford.

DOLLY. You're quite mistaken. We are going to

have an open-air performance of *As You Like It* very soon.

GORDON. Awfully jolly. Where does it take place ?

DOLLY. At the—er—the Amores'. You remember Clarence Amore ?

GORDON. Rather. Decent fellow, Clarence, but a bit of a prig.

DOLLY. A prig ?

GORDON. Used to have a frightfully good opinion of himself.

DOLLY. He has now—er—I mean——

GORDON. Of course he has. Those selfish beggars never alter.

DOLLY (*changing the subject*). Mr. Fenny, the Rector, wishes me to play Rosalind.

GORDON. You 'll make a fine Rosalind. Especially in the—er—what-do-you-call-'ems ? I must see if I can't help too.

DOLLY. Then you don't think there 's any objection ?

GORDON. Of course not.

DOLLY. Not even to the — er — what-do-you-call-'ems ?

GORDON. Lord, no ! That 's nothing nowadays. Why, on the professional stage often enough they don't wear anything at all ! Unless it 's a few beads.

DOLLY. I 'm glad you look at the matter like that. I thought you would.

(*There is a slight pause.* DOLLY *looks in front of her, thinking.* GORDON *looks at her.*)

Well, Gordon, you haven't told me how you 've got on in India.

GORDON. I 've been working hard.

DOLLY (*slyly*). Rather a change for you.

GORDON. I know I used to be a slacker. But I 've been working hard these last three years.

DOLLY. I 'm very glad.

GORDON. I had a reason.

(*She looks at him, finds he is looking at her, and she looks away quickly.*)

GORDON. I wanted to earn enough to keep a wife.

(DOLLY *does not move. There is a slight pause.* GORDON *rises uneasily and goes to the upper window. He finds the heat oppressive.*)

DOLLY (*at length*). Oh! I hope you—you succeeded.

GORDON. They are so satisfied with me that I am to go out again, after my holiday, at an increased salary. (*He comes behind the settee.*) So now I 've only to find my wife.

DOLLY (*in a whisper*). Yes.

GORDON. Dolly, do you think I 'd have kept straight and worked like I have done these three years if there hadn't been a girl, one particular girl —here in England—whom I wanted for my wife ?

(DOLLY'S *face shows that she guesses what is coming. She does not speak.*)

You know who that girl is. The girl I 've been thinking of ever since I left England, the girl I 'm going to marry if she 'll have me. . . . It 's you, Dolly.

(DOLLY, *with a slight sob, covers her face with her hands and bends her head.* GORDON *quietly comes round the settee and sits by*

her. He takes her hands and draws them to him, looking into her face for an answer.)

DOLLY (*passionately*). Gordon! No! Don't ask me; don't ask me. (*She tears herself from him.*) I can't, I can't.

(DOLLY *quickly goes to the lower window seat, and sinks upon it overcome, leaving* GORDON *dumb with surprise.*)

(MRS. CARTWRIGHT *comes into the room. At the door she stands dumbfoundered at the sight of* GORDON. *Then with a glance at* DOLLY *she sees that something is wrong, and collects her wits.*)

MRS. C. (*very sweetly*). Mr. Leigh! How do you do? (*She shakes hands.*) I 'd no idea you had returned from India. So you 've come to pay your old friends a visit?

GORDON. Yes.

MRS. C. So good of you. Have you congratulated Dolly?

GORDON. Congratulated?

MRS. C. Didn't you know she was engaged?

GORDON (*thunderstruck*). What! (*He looks at* DOLLY, *who still does not move.*)

MRS. C. Yes, to Clarence Amore. You know him, I think. The wedding is fixed for September.

GORDON. I didn't know.

(*He suddenly wheels round and takes up his straw hat.*)

MRS. C. They are so fond of each other.

GORDON. I—I wish you all happiness, I 'm sure, Dolly.

(DOLLY *raises her head and looks at him.*)

DOLLY. Thank you.

GORDON (*half-dazed*). Good-bye, Mrs. Cartwright. Good-bye—Dolly.

DOLLY. Good-bye, Gordon.

MRS. C. Must you go ? (*She rings the bell.*) So good of you to call. No doubt we shall see you again before you go back to India.

GORDON (*at the door*). Very possibly. I can't say.

(*The* MAID *opens the door.* GORDON *goes out, and the* MAID *closes the door and withdraws to show him out.*)

MRS. C. (*pretending not to notice* DOLLY'S *emotion*). How strange that Mr. Leigh should not have heard of your engagement, Dolly.

DOLLY. Very. (*She rises and crosses the room to the door.*)

MRS. C. Where are you going, Dolly ?

DOLLY. I 'm going to my room. I 'm not very well.

MRS. C. Lie down till dinner-time, dear.

(DOLLY *goes out. As soon as she has gone* MRS. C. *hurries to the door and half opens it, looking to see that* DOLLY *has really gone upstairs. Then she calls to the* MAID *in the hall.*)

MRS. C. Mary. (MRS. C. *returns to the settee.*)

MAID (*appearing at the door*). Yes, ma'am.

MRS. C. You can take the tea away. (*The* MAID *crosses to the tray.*) Oh, by the way, Mary, the gentleman you just showed out was Mr. Leigh.

MAID. Yes, ma'am.

MRS. C. In future Miss Dolly is not at home to him. Let me know if he calls.

MAID. Very well, ma'am.

(*The* MAID *goes out with the tray.* MRS. CARTWRIGHT *takes up Mrs. Humphry Ward's novel, and puts her legs up on the settee. She opens the book and begins to read.*)

The CURTAIN *falls.*

ACT II

The scene is again MRS. CARTWRIGHT'S *drawing-room. It is about eleven o'clock on the day after the First Act. The weather is still hot and sunny.*

The MAID *opens the door and ushers* GORDON LEIGH *into the room.*

GORDON. Tell Miss Dolly Mr. Leigh wishes to see her for a minute.

MAID. Mr. Leigh? Yes, sir. Did you say Miss Dolly, sir?

GORDON. Certainly.

(*The* MAID *hesitates, and then makes up her mind.*)

MAID. Very well, sir.

(*The* MAID *goes out.* GORDON *puts his hat down and strolls uneasily round the room. Very soon the door is opened and* MRS. CARTWRIGHT *comes in.*)

GORDON (*turning eagerly*). Dolly. (*Seeing* MRS. CARTWRIGHT, *his face changes.*) Oh, it 's you!

MRS. C. Good morning, Mr. Leigh.

GORDON. Good morning. I called to see Dolly.

MRS. C. I 'm afraid you can't see her this morning.

GORDON. But I am most anxious——

MRS. C. I 'm sorry. It is out of the question.

GORDON. Why?

MRS. C. Because she 's in bed.

GORDON. Oh, I beg your pardon !

MRS. C. She was not very well last night, and she has not got up yet.

GORDON. Mrs. Cartwright, is that the only reason I can't see her ?

MRS. C. You wish me to be frank with you ?

GORDON. If you please.

MRS. C. Then sit down. (*She sits on the settee.*)

GORDON. Thanks. (*He takes the left arm-chair.*)

MRS. C. Dolly has asked me to give you a message.

GORDON. Yes.

MRS. C. She hopes that you will not call here in future, as she does not wish to meet you again.

GORDON. I see. . . . Of course I shouldn't think of troubling her again if she doesn't wish it. (*A pause.*) This is hard lines, Mrs. Cartwright.

MRS. C. (*coolly*). What is hard lines, Mr. Leigh ?

GORDON. Coming home and finding Dolly engaged.

MRS. C. You don't mean to say that you haven't got over that boyish affection for Dolly ?

GORDON. When I got to India I found it was a good deal more than a boyish affection. I was a fool to give you my promise.

MRS. C. When you promised me not to write to Dolly you quite agreed that it was the best thing to do to ensure her future happiness. I pointed out that you were not in a position to marry her, and that I didn't think you ever would be. Excuse my frankness.

GORDON. That 's all right. Three years ago I was an idle young waster, not fit to ask a girl like Dolly to be my wife. But when I got out to India

I didn't forget her as you said I should. I determined to make myself fit to marry her; and that 's all I 've thought of whilst I 've been out there, that 's all I 've worked for. I succeeded, and I came home to find I was too late. It 's rather a knock-down blow for me.

MRS. C. I 'm sorry. But you see she has forgotten all about you.

GORDON. I can't understand it. Clarence used to be rather fond of Violet Fenny.

MRS. C. Nonsense.

GORDON. It 's quite true. And Violet has admired Clarence ever since they were children, and she 's not the sort of girl to change.

MRS. C. My dear Mr. Leigh, I am grieved to see you so upset, but I cannot possibly listen to insinuations of this sort.

GORDON. No, of course not. I hope I haven't made a fool of myself.

MRS. C. If you really love Dolly, you should be glad that she at least is happy. Forgive me for saying so, but marriage with Clarence opens out for her a future much larger than she could have hoped for with you.

GORDON (*rising*). That 's not much consolation for me, after all. Good-bye, Mrs. Cartwright.

MRS. C. Are you going? (*She opens the door.*)

GORDON. Tell Dolly that since she wishes it, I 'll keep out of her way in future. (*He goes out.*)

MRS. C. (*following him out*). Yes, that will be better.

(*After a brief pause, during which the front door is heard to shut,* MRS. C. *returns and goes straight to the bell, which she rings.*)

(*The* MAID *appears soon.*)

Is Miss Dolly getting up ?

MAID. Yes, ma'am.

MRS. C. Didn't I tell you that Miss Dolly is not at home to Mr. Leigh ?

MAID. I wasn't quite certain whether that was the gentleman, ma'am, till he came in.

MRS. C. Don't forget in future.

MAID. No, ma'am. (*As the* MAID *withdraws,* DOLLY *enters.*)

MRS. C. Well, dear, feeling better now ?

DOLLY. Yes, thanks, much better. Has some one called ?

MRS. C. Called ? No, dear, no one.

DOLLY. I thought I heard a voice. Clarence said he would come this morning.

(DOLLY *sits on the lower window seat.* MRS. C., *taking some embroidery from the table, sits on the settee.*)

MRS. C. How long had Mr. Leigh been here, yesterday, before I came in ?

DOLLY. Why can't you call him Gordon, like we used to ?

MRS. C. Now you are engaged, Dolly——

DOLLY. What nonsense. We used to climb apple-trees together when we were children.

MRS. C. At any rate *I* never climbed apple-trees with him, and so I shall call him Mr. Leigh. How long had he been here ?

DOLLY. I don't know ; not very long.

MRS. C. I never heard him come in.

DOLLY. No ; he came through the window.

MRS. C. Through the window ! Upon my word,

what would Clarence have thought if he 'd seen him ?

DOLLY. I expect he 'd have been politely surprised, but does it really matter what Clarence thinks ?

MRS. C. You ought to pay a little more attention to Clarence's likes and dislikes. How will you get on when you are married ? Remember a husband and wife should be one.

DOLLY. Very likely. But which one ?

MRS. C. I suppose that depends upon circumstances.

(*The* MAID *opens the door.*)

MAID. Mr. Fenny and Miss Violet have called, ma'am.

MRS. C. (*rising and going to the door*). Oh, come in, Mr. Fenny !

(MR. FENNY *and* VIOLET *come in.* *The* RECTOR *is a plump little round-faced pleasant man, clean-shaven and pink. His trousers are secured by cycling clips at the bottoms, and he carries a black straw hat attached to his button-hole by a hat-guard.* VIOLET *is a slight, dark, romantic-looking girl.*)

RECTOR (*shaking hands with* MRS. C.). Good morning. Wonderful weather we are having.

MRS. C. Good morning. (*Shaking hands with* VIOLET.) Good morning, Violet.

VIOLET. Good morning, Mrs. Cartwright.

RECTOR (*greeting* DOLLY). We have cycled round. Violet said she was coming to see you, Miss Cartwright, so I thought I might as well accompany her and talk over the suggested—er—entertainment—at the Floral Fête.

DOLLY. I should love to.

(VIOLET *crosses to* DOLLY, *and they sit together in the lower window seat. The* RECTOR *sits on the settee, and* MRS. C. *on the right.*)

RECTOR. You have heard about it ?

MRS. C. Mrs. Scattergood told us.

RECTOR. Mrs. Scattergood ? Ah yes ! What did she say ?

MRS. C. I don't think she was exactly pleased at the idea of a play.

RECTOR. But Shakespeare, my dear Mrs. Cartwright, Shakespeare !

MRS. C. Yes. But you can't get away from the fact that though he *was* Shakespeare he wrote plays.

RECTOR. I prefer to think of him as our national poet. But even the drama is not wholly to be condemned. Of course there is a certain class of play . . . er . . . we should be very careful where a woman's honour is concerned.

MRS. C. Naturally.

RECTOR. But the ethical lessons of melodrama appear to me to be as unexceptionable as those of our ancient morality plays ; and most dramatists of the modern school have, I understand, a message of some sort to deliver.

MRS. C. You mean that they are inclined to be preachy ?

RECTOR. It *has* been said that the modern stage is usurping the functions of the pulpit. I rarely visit the theatre, so I confess that I do not know very much about the question, though I frequently read the dramatic criticisms in the newspapers.

MRS. C. It 's so difficult to make out what they mean, isn't it ?

RECTOR. I do not quarrel with them on that account. Indeed that is, perhaps, at times a very good thing.

VIOLET (*who has been talking to* DOLLY). Now, father, you didn't come here to deliver a lecture on the theatre.

RECTOR. I shouldn't think of doing so, my dear; I don't know enough about it.

VIOLET. You never let that prevent you talking about a subject. (*To the others.*) That is why father is such an excellent clergyman.

RECTOR (*smiling happily*). Nonsense, nonsense. But you are quite right; I cannot stay very long. First of all I want to know, Miss Cartwright, if you will take the part of Rosalind ?

VIOLET. That 's all right, father; I 've been talking to Dolly.

RECTOR. You will ?

DOLLY. With pleasure.

RECTOR. Excellent. And now then, Mrs. Cartwright, will you give us the benefit of your advice and assistance ?

MRS. C. If you think I shall be of any use.

RECTOR. There is a matter which I should like you to attend to.

MRS. C. But I 'm quite inexperienced. Would it not be better for you to attend to it yourself ?

RECTOR. I am afraid that it is a duty which I can hardly undertake.

MRS. C. What is it ?

RECTOR. Measuring the ladies for their costumes.

MRS. C. Oh, I see! (*The* GIRLS *laugh.*) I will do that, of course.

RECTOR. I have the measurement forms from the costumier's. (*He produces a sheaf of papers and gives some to* MRS. C.) You will find complete instructions printed on the backs.

MRS. C. (*studying the papers*). But these are—they seem to be——

RECTOR. Let me see. Oh yes! I have given you the gentlemen's forms. These are for the ladies. (*He gives her the right ones.*)

MRS. C. Yes. I can understand these better.

RECTOR. Violet will give you a list of names, and any other information you may require.

(CLARENCE *opens the door and comes into the room.*)

CLARENCE. Good morning, everybody.

(*There is a general murmur of welcome.*)

CLARENCE. What dreadful deed are you discussing so early in the morning?

MRS. C. The Rector has come to talk about the dramatic performance.

CLARENCE. Ah yes! (*Pleasantly.*) Can I be of any assistance?

RECTOR. Of the very greatest, my dear Amore. I shall take an early opportunity of calling upon you to select a suitable site in your grounds. You know we have asked Miss Cartwright to take the part of Rosalind?

CLARENCE. And is she going to?

DOLLY. I have told the Rector that I shall be delighted to do so.

CLARENCE. I am very glad to hear it. (*Magnanimously.*) You have my warm approval.

DOLLY (*involuntarily*). Oh ! (*She suppresses her surprise.*)

RECTOR. I 'm afraid I have not time to discuss the proposed arrangements now. I am exceedingly busy this morning. But later on, later on. (*He rises and bustles to the door.*) By the way, Amore, have you seen Harry Carver this morning ?

CLARENCE. Carver ? No. Why ?

RECTOR. I believe the poor fellow is much upset. His engagement with Miss Collingwood is broken off.

DOLLY. }
MRS. C. } Broken off !

CLARENCE. How is that ?

RECTOR. Mrs. Scattergood tells us Miss Collingwood has jilted him.

MRS. C. When was that ?

RECTOR. Last night didn't Mrs. Scattergood say, Violet ?

VIOLET. Yes, last night.

CLARENCE (*bitterly*). Only last night ! And already that woman is going about the village with the delicious bit of seandal on the tip of her tongue.

MRS. C. My dear Clarence, it is not seandal. It is an item of general information.

RECTOR. You are very harsh in your judgment, Amore.

CLARENCE. I feel very strongly about that sort of thing. Isn't it hard enough for a man to be eruelly thrown over by a girl, without having the whole village gloating over the news ?

RECTOR (*sincerely*). Gloating? No, no. That implies malice. Let us try to think the best of our fellow-creatures.

CLARENCE. They don't give us much encouragement.

RECTOR. I try to, nevertheless.

MRS. C. Well, of course, that 's your business, isn't it? Must you really go?

RECTOR. I must. You won't forget about the measurements? (*He goes out.*)

MRS. C. I 'll begin now. Which of you girls will come and be measured? (*She follows the* RECTOR.)

VIOLET. Will you go first, Dolly?

DOLLY. No, dear, you go. I want to speak to Clarence.

VIOLET. I suppose I shall have to partly undress.

DOLLY. Perhaps you 'll be able to manage.

VIOLET. I 'll try.

(VIOLET *goes out.* DOLLY *follows her to the door and sees that it is closed.*)

CLARENCE (*seating himself on the settee*). Poor Carver. I cannot conceive anything more heartless than the behaviour of a girl who jilts a man.

DOLLY. What about a man who jilts a girl?

CLARENCE. That is nearly as bad, but—there is a certain difference——

DOLLY. Because she can get damages, you mean?

CLARENCE (*reproachfully*). I wasn't thinking of that. A promise to marry ought to be sacred. That is one of the things they arrange better in Germany, where a betrothal is nearly as binding as a marriage ceremony.

DOLLY. Thank Heaven we are both English! (CLARENCE *looks at her in surprise. She walks to the arm*

of the settee and leans over it.) Clarence, we haven't much time. Violet will be back soon. I want to ask you to release me.

CLARENCE (*staring at her blankly*). Release you ?

DOLLY. I want to break off our engagement.

CLARENCE (*rising*). You mean you want to throw me over ?

DOLLY. Don't put it like that.

CLARENCE. But it *is* that, however you put it. That 's what everybody will say. You jilted me.

DOLLY. But, Clarence——

CLARENCE (*excited*). My God, what a fool I shall look ! Have you thought of that ? Of what people will think about it ?

DOLLY. I haven't. It is a matter which seems to concern only ourselves, and I don't care in the least what other people think.

CLARENCE. But I do. You *must* realise what it means to me ! I—Clarence Amore—thrown over, like, like—Carver, for instance, and everybody laughing at me.

DOLLY. That is absurd. Engagements are broken off every day.

CLARENCE (*wildly*). But, don't you see, *you* throw *me* over. It wouldn't be so bad if *I* had broken it off.

DOLLY (*staring at him*). Oh, I see ! (*A pause.*) Well, you can do it that way if you like.

CLARENCE. Absurd. How could I make that plain to people ?

DOLLY. I don't know. Get engaged to some other girl at once. That will show them.

CLARENCE. You talk without a trace of feeling. Dorothy, you can't have changed so completely all at once?

DOLLY. No, I fancy it 's been going on for some time. (*Gently.*) Do you care for me *very* much, Clarence?

CLARENCE. Do you need to ask that?

DOLLY. I 'm sorry. Clarence, I 'm very sorry.

CLARENCE (*hoping she is relenting*). Dorothy! (*He tries to take her hand.*)

DOLLY (*drawing it away*). No, no. You must understand that I mean what I 've said.

(*There is a pause.*)

CLARENCE. Has our—our quarrel, yesterday, about the dramatic performance anything to do with this?

DOLLY. No. At least, I think it caused me to make up my mind.

CLARENCE (*eagerly*). But, Dorothy, I 've consented. Didn't you hear me tell the Rector you could take the part?

DOLLY. Yes, I heard you. It was very good of you.

CLARENCE. Well, then——

DOLLY. But I suspect you only consented because you saw I was determined, and because you didn't want to—to make a fool of yourself—excuse me, that was your own expression—by objecting before the Rector.

CLARENCE (*firmly*). Dorothy, this is all nonsense. I shall not hear of breaking our engagement. This is simply an exhibition of pique on your part. You haven't got over your annoyance with me yesterday.

DOLLY. I assure you that I have.

CLARENCE. Then what is your reason ?

DOLLY. Have you ever read *The Egoist* ?

CLARENCE. No. What 's that got to do with it ?

DOLLY. You ought to read it ; it would do you good. There is a girl in *The Egoist* who is engaged to a man, rich and splendid, just like you. It would be a fine match for her, only she finds out that his character—I mean—she finds out that they wouldn't suit one another, and so she refuses to marry him.

CLARENCE. Did you begin to find out that I wouldn't suit you ?

DOLLY. Yes.

CLARENCE. When ?

DOLLY. You 've noticed a difference lately. You said so yesterday. I began to find out that you didn't show much consideration for other people, that you thought of yourself first of all.

CLARENCE. Dorothy !

DOLLY. Forgive me ; it is better to speak out. You expect to be admired. You expected me to admire you. You want a wife who will always worship you ; I couldn't keep it up for a lifetime.

CLARENCE. How do you know ? I mean, how do you know that I shouldn't worship you all my life ?

(DOLLY *maintains a significant silence.*)

(*Gently.*) Dorothy, I 'm going to be firm with you. I 'm not going to take you at your word. You will be sorry for this to-morrow.

DOLLY. I 'll risk it. Please, Clarence, give me back my promise.

CLARENCE. You loved me once.

DOLLY. I think I did.

CLARENCE. And now ?

DOLLY. I like you ; but—but I can see qualities in you that are faults. Even if I still loved you, as you call it, it would be wrong to marry you, because I 'm afraid that all love passes away in time, and the faults remain, grow worse, perhaps.

(*There is a slight pause.*)

CLARENCE. Dorothy.

DOLLY. You will take back your ring ?

CLARENCE. I was going to say, Dorothy, we will talk this over again, some other day.

DOLLY. No, no. It must be settled now.

CLARENCE. You are excited, dear, and overwrought.

DOLLY. My promise, Clarence.

CLARENCE. I hold you to it.

DOLLY. Give it me back. Release me.

CLARENCE. Never.

DOLLY (*clinging to him*). You must, you must.

CLARENCE. Hush, Dorothy, control yourself. Violet is coming. (*Very tensely and firmly.*) Remember, you are to be my wife.

(CLARENCE *releases himself from her grasp, and turns towards the window.* DOLLY *sinks on to the settee.* VIOLET *comes in.*)

VIOLET. Mrs. Cartwright is ready for you, Dolly.

DOLLY (*vaguely*). What ? What for ?

VIOLET. To measure you. It 's your turn now.

CLARENCE (*coming to the rescue*). Ah yes ! You 've just been measured. Did it go off satisfactorily ?

VIOLET. Quite, thanks. Mrs. Cartwright's waiting for Dolly with the tape-measure.

DOLLY (*with an effort*). Very well. I 'll go.

(DOLLY *rises and goes out of the room.* VIOLET *looks at her curiously, and* CLARENCE *too watches her. They both sit in arm-chairs, a long way from each other.*)

CLARENCE. Hot, isn't it ?

VIOLET. Yes. Of course, it 's June.

CLARENCE. It generally snows in June.

VIOLET. The seasons seem to have got wrong, somehow.

(*An uncomfortable pause.*)

CLARENCE. I wonder if Mrs. Cartwright would mind if I lit a cigarette ?

VIOLET. I 'm sure she wouldn't.

(CLARENCE *does so, and goes to the window to throw the match into the garden. He notices a book on the window seat, picks it up, and glances at the title-page. Then he throws it pettishly on the seat with a bang.*)

VIOLET. What book is that ?

CLARENCE. *The Egoist.*

VIOLET. Oh yes, Meredith !

(*Another uncomfortable pause.*)

CLARENCE. Won't you play something for me ?

VIOLET. I so rarely touch the piano now.

CLARENCE. You used to play for me often.

VIOLET. In the old days ?

CLARENCE. Yes.

VIOLET. Well, if you like. What shall I play ?

CLARENCE. One of the ' Songs without Words.' We used to be so fond of them.

VIOLET. Yes. Did'nt we ?

(VIOLET *goes to the piano and plays Number Four of Mendelssohn's ' Lieder Ohne Worter '*

from memory. She plays it very softly and sentimentally. CLARENCE *hangs over the end of the piano, listening and smoking. He watches her. Occasionally she catches his eye and immediately looks away.*)

CLARENCE (*when she has finished*). Thank you, so much. What a charming touch you have.

VIOLET. Doesn't Dolly play for you ?

CLARENCE. Not much. I don't care for Dorothy's touch.

VIOLET. It 's a little hard, perhaps.

CLARENCE. Play me another.

VIOLET. No, I—I 'd rather not, if you don't mind.

(VIOLET *gets up quickly ; and, evidently rather moved by the music and the sentimental recollections it has evoked, she sits on the settee.* CLARENCE *throws his cigarette out of the window and follows her, sitting by her.*)

VIOLET. I 'm going up to town on Monday.

CLARENCE. Are you ?

VIOLET. I want to have some photographs taken.

CLARENCE. Give me one, will you ?

VIOLET. If you would like one. I might give you and Dolly one in a silver frame for a wedding present.

CLARENCE (*uneasily*). Wedding present. Ah !

VIOLET. When is the date ?

CLARENCE. I don't know—that is, I 'm not quite certain. Do you remember the last photograph you gave me ?

VIOLET. It was the one in which I 'm standing against a latticed window with my face in the shadow, and a bowl of roses on the window sill.

CLARENCE. Yes. I gave you one of mine in exchange.

VIOLET. In evening dress. I think it is the best you ever had taken.

CLARENCE. Most men look well in evening clothes.

VIOLET. But you especially.

CLARENCE. Have you still got it ?

VIOLET. Of course. You—you wrote on the back.

CLARENCE. Did I ? Oh yes, I remember !

(*A slight pause.*)

VIOLET. Dolly 's a long time.

CLARENCE. No, she 's only just gone upstairs.

VIOLET. I wonder what the costumes will be like.

CLARENCE. I hope they 'll be respectable.

VIOLET. That sounds as if you don't approve of them.

CLARENCE. I 'm afraid I don't, very much.

VIOLET. Oh ! Does Dolly know ?

CLARENCE. I told her I should prefer her not to wear one. Indeed, that I should prefer that she did not act in the play at all.

VIOLET. I 'd no idea. Surely after that she would wish to give it up ?

CLARENCE. One would have thought so. You would have given it up, eh ?

VIOLET. I—I suppose so.

CLARENCE. You would give up your part—Celia—if I wished you to ?

VIOLET. If—if you wished it ; yes.

CLARENCE. Ah ! You always understood me. (*A pause.*) You will be a good wife to some one, some day.

VIOLET. I shall never marry.

CLARENCE. Never ? Why not ?

VIOLET. Because—I—don't ask me. My mind is made up.

CLARENCE. If you should ever love ?

VIOLET. That can never happen. Never, now.

CLARENCE. You mean it has already happened ?

VIOLET (*gently*). Yes.

CLARENCE. Lucky man. Does he know ?

VIOLET. He is engaged to another girl.

CLARENCE. Engaged ? (*Sharply.*) Violet . . . who is he ?

VIOLET. I can't tell you any more.

CLARENCE. I ask you to tell me, for your own sake.

VIOLET. I worship him ; I shall worship him all my life.

CLARENCE. Violet, you mean me !

(*She does not answer.*)

CLARENCE. You love *me,* Violet ?

VIOLET (*quietly*). I never meant you to know.

(CLARENCE *rises and goes to the back of the room, pacing the floor in agitation.* VIOLET *stealthily wipes her eyes with her handkerchief.*)

CLARENCE (*at length*). This is a tragedy, Violet. If only I were free !

(VIOLET *straightens at this and listens.*)

When I say that it is a tragedy I mean that I have begun to doubt whether Dorothy will be a suitable wife for me. I have discovered faults, Violet, many flaws in her character.

VIOLET. You are bound to her in honour.

CLARENCE. I know my duty. Don't be afraid. I shall have to bear the consequences of my mistake.

VIOLET. Mistake ?

CLARENCE. Yes, for it is a mistake, a terrible mistake. I can see it now. I ought to have asked you to marry me. If I were free I would ask you now.

(*Leaning over the settee he gently kisses her unresisting lips.*)

VIOLET (*faintly, as she rises*). I can't face Dolly. I must go, now.

CLARENCE. She will think it strange if you go away like this. If you 'll excuse me I had better go. It would be unwise for us to meet her together, and I have a particular reason for not wishing to see her again just now.

VIOLET. Very well. Go—go quickly.

CLARENCE. Good-bye, Violet. (*He stretches his hand to touch hers, which is resting on the arm of the settee. She quickly draws it away.* CLARENCE *goes out of the room.*)

(*As soon as* CLARENCE *has gone* VIOLET *wipes her eyes and goes up to the piano, sits at it, and begins to play again, very softly, the Mendelssohn 'Lied.' At the end of the eighth bar she stops suddenly and bows her head, her hands strike the keys with a discordant clash. She remains motionless.* DOLLY *enters and at first sees no one. She looks round the room in surprise, and then notices* VIOLET.)

DOLLY (*in surprise*). Violet! Whatever are you doing?

VIOLET (*recovering herself with a start*). I—oh—I was only thinking. (*She rises.*)

DOLLY. Didn't I hear you playing?

VIOLET. Yes.

DOLLY. Has Clarence gone ?

VIOLET. Yes.

DOLLY. I 'm very glad. We can have a chat.

VIOLET. I—I think I ought to be going too.

DOLLY. Don't go yet; come and sit down. (*Looking curiously at* VIOLET.) What 's the matter with you ? You look as if you 'd been crying. (*She sits on the settee.*)

VIOLET (*still standing*). I have a—a touch of neuralgia. I really must go.

DOLLY. But I want to talk about our costumes and lots of things.

VIOLET. Costumes ? Oh yes! Do you know, Dolly, I don't think I shall take part in the performance.

DOLLY. What ! Why, you 've only just been measured !

VIOLET. I 've—I 've changed my mind.

DOLLY. You must have done it very quickly then. (*She reflects.*) Ah, Clarence has been talking to you !

VIOLET. Clarence ! Why should you suppose——

DOLLY. It must be Clarence ; I know he doesn't approve of the performance. Now tell me, isn't it Clarence ?

VIOLET (*after a pause*). Yes.

DOLLY. What on earth does it matter to you what Clarence likes or doesn't like ?

VIOLET. Nothing, of course. (*A pause.*) Only I—oh—I won't take any notice of him.

DOLLY. I can't see what business he has to interfere with you.

VIOLET. We are old friends, you know.

DOLLY. But he allows *me* to take part; you heard him.

VIOLET. Yes. Oh, don't trouble, Dolly! I'll accept the part, I think, after all. (*A pause.*) Now, if you don't mind— (*She turns to the door.*)

DOLLY (*rising*). Look here, Violet, you are behaving in the most extraordinary manner. What is the meaning of it?

VIOLET. Oh, please let me go!

DOLLY. Why have you been crying? Because I 'm sure you *have* been crying. You couldn't possibly have neuralgia in weather like this.

VIOLET. I—I— (*She cannot speak.*)

DOLLY. What has Clarence been saying to you?

VIOLET (*turning upon her with a sudden burst of passion*). I love Clarence; I 've loved him since we were both children; I shall love him all my life.

DOLLY (*astounded*). Violet!

VIOLET (*weakening suddenly*). Forgive me, Dolly. I can't help it; I love him. Forgive me. (*She sinks to the floor and clasps* DOLLY'S *knees.*) Don't —don't strike me. (*She cowers before* DOLLY.)

DOLLY. Why ever should I strike you? Get up, Violet, for goodness' sake.

VIOLET (*rising*). Aren't you—angry?

DOLLY. No, I 'm very glad.

VIOLET. Glad!

DOLLY. Sit down here and pull yourself together, and tell me all about it. (*She draws* VIOLET *to the settee and they both sit.*) Now then!

VIOLET. It 's very good of you to take it like this.

But I promise you I 'll go away and pass out of Clarence's life for ever. I promise it solemnly.

DOLLY (*quickly*). Don't promise anything rashly. I want to hear the whole story.

VIOLET. I can't tell *you*, of all people.

DOLLY. Yes, please, you must. Both for your sake and mine. You say you 've loved Clarence for a long time ?

VIOLET. I have adored him, worshipped him.

DOLLY. You 've had something to do with spoiling him, evidently.

VIOLET. He has always been *rather* fond of me; before you came to live here I think he was *very* fond of me. He seemed to like being with me, and we spent a great deal of time together. But somehow, we never—never——

DOLLY. Never got any further.

VIOLET. No. He knew I admired him—a girl can always let a man see that——

DOLLY. Yes.

VIOLET. And I think he appreciated it.

DOLLY. I 'm sure he would.

VIOLET. Once or twice I thought he was going to ask me—but— (*A pause.*) Of course, I couldn't expect him to. I was only a curate's daughter. I wasn't rich, or beautiful, or brilliant ; how could I hope that he would think me fit to be the mistress of Bollin Hall, with all those servants to manage, and all the entertaining ?

DOLLY. My dear Violet, what am I, if it comes to that ?

VIOLET. You 've got brains and determination, at any rate.

DOLLY. Thank you. But it 's absurd to depreciate yourself in this way, to pretend that you are nothing.

VIOLET. I feel nothing—less than nothing—beside Clarence, who is so noble and so splendid.

DOLLY. Good gracious! (*She rises.*) If you feel like that, you 'll make an ideal wife for Clarence. (DOLLY *goes up to the lower window and looks out of it, reflecting.*)

VIOLET. I don't know how I 've had the courage to tell you all this.

DOLLY. What I can't understand is why you haven't told me before. Why should it have happened to-day ?

VIOLET. I don't know. Yes, I do. I suppose I was upset by what Clarence said to me just now.

DOLLY (*very interested*). Ah ! What did he say ?

VIOLET. No, I 'll never tell you that. Never ! Never ! Never ! Wild horses should not drag it from me.

DOLLY. Look here, Violet, do have a little common sense. You don't know how important it is. Has Clarence been making love to you ?

VIOLET. Well—in a way. Of course he didn't make love properly ; he is much too honourable to do that whilst he is engaged to you.

DOLLY (*impatiently*). Oh ! will you tell me exactly what he said ?

VIOLET (*slightly alarmed*). You are not getting angry, are you ?

DOLLY. No, no, of course not. Please tell me.

VIOLET. He said something like this, not in these very words, of course : That he was afraid that

his engagement with you was a mistake; and that if he had been free he might—he might have asked me to marry him.

DOLLY (*with a glad cry*). What!!

VIOLET (*seriously alarmed, rising to get away*). Dolly, you 're not——

DOLLY (*excited*). Oh, do sit down! It 's all right. I 'm not going to eat you. (*They sit together again.*) But that practically releases me from my engagement, doesn't it?

VIOLET. Do you think so?

DOLLY. When I find that Clarence has told another girl that he would rather marry her than me, surely I can consider my engagement is broken off?

VIOLET. Not if you don't wish it. He feels bound to you.

DOLLY. But I do wish it. Only this morning I was imploring him to give me back my promise and release me.

VIOLET (*awestruck*). Dolly, you don't mean that you don't wish to be his wife?

DOLLY. I wouldn't marry Clarence if he were the only— (*Suddenly recollecting herself.*) Of course, I mean he 's a splendid fellow, the very man for you; but I feel that I am quite unsuited to him.

VIOLET. It is better to find that out before it 's too late. You don't happen to like any one else, do you?

DOLLY (*confidingly*). The fact is, I believe I do. Gordon Leigh came home yesterday.

VIOLET (*nodding*). Gordon Leigh? Yes.

DOLLY. And he proposed to me before he knew I was engaged.

VIOLET. Didn't he notice your ring ?

DOLLY. Men never notice things like that. Well, all at once, in a flash, I discovered that I had always been fond of Gordon.

VIOLET. What did you do ?

DOLLY. Refused him, of course. What else could I do ? It was terribly hard, because I had found out some time ago that I should never get on with Clarence.

VIOLET. How terrible. I wish I could help you.

DOLLY. If Gordon had only proposed to me to-day ; now I am free.

VIOLET. Perhaps he will when he hears about it.

DOLLY (*despondently*). I don't know.

VIOLET (*tentatively*). How would it be—how would it be to let Gordon know that you *are* free ?

DOLLY. Wouldn't that be rather——

VIOLET. I don't think so.

DOLLY. Very well, I might perhaps. We 'll see what it looks like on paper.

(DOLLY *quickly crosses to the writing-desk, and takes a sheet of notepaper.*)

VIOLET. What are you going to say ?

DOLLY. What do you suggest ?

VIOLET. I was just thinking. After all he did ask you to marry him. Why couldn't you take back your refusal ?

DOLLY. Violet !

VIOLET. Tell him that you are free now, and that you will accept him.

DOLLY. By Jove, I will !

(DOLLY *starts writing furiously.* VIOLET *lightly runs to the piano and breaks into the Mendelssohn 'Lied' again, but in a very different manner. Instead of playing it sentimentally she makes it sound quite jaunty and light-hearted by playing it quickly and trippingly. About half-way through* DOLLY *calls her. She jumps up and runs to* DOLLY.)

DOLLY (*handing her the letter*). How will that do? (DOLLY *addresses the envelope.*)

VIOLET (*having glanced through it*). That 's all right.

DOLLY. I ask him to come and see me at once, you notice.

VIOLET. There wasn't any need to do that.

(DOLLY *puts the letter in the envelope and seals it.*)

DOLLY. This must be delivered at once. I don't like to send one of the maids; mother might see it.

VIOLET. I 'll take it for you. I can cycle round by the Leighs' on my way home.

DOLLY. It 's awfully good of you.

VIOLET. Not at all. (*She takes the letter.*) Do I look as if I 'd been crying?

DOLLY. It doesn't show much.

VIOLET. Is there a mirror? Oh yes!

(*She comes to the mantelpiece and looks in the mirror. Placing the letter on the mantelpiece she takes her handkerchief and carefully rubs her cheeks.*)

DOLLY. Are you going to wait until Clarence asks you again, or shall *you* write to *him*?

VIOLET. I think I shall wait. Clarence will ask me,

I suppose, as soon as you give him back his ring. When shall you do that ?

DOLLY. This afternoon. We are going to watch the cricket-match and have tea at the Amores'.

VIOLET. Very well ; I shall go and watch the cricket-match too.

(MRS. CARTWRIGHT *comes into the room.* VIOLET *turns towards her, and leaves the letter on the mantelpiece.*)

VIOLET. I 'm just off, Mrs. Cartwright.

MRS. C. You won't stay to lunch ?

VIOLET. I can't to-day, thanks.

MRS. C. Good-bye, then.

(VIOLET *kisses her and goes out, followed by* DOLLY. MRS. C. *takes up her embroidery and sits in the right arm-chair.* DOLLY *comes in.*)

MRS. C. Violet Fenny has gone off a lot, lately.

DOLLY. She said she had a touch of neuralgia this morning.

MRS. C. Clarence didn't stay long.

DOLLY. No. I fancy he 's rather busy to-day.

(VIOLET *appears at the upper window.*)

VIOLET. Dolly, I forgot that letter.

DOLLY. Oh, Violet ! Where is it ?

VIOLET. On the mantelpiece.

DOLLY. Here you are.

(DOLLY *rapidly finds the letter and hands it to* VIOLET *through the window.*)

VIOLET. Thanks. Awfully sorry. (VIOLET *disappears.*)

MRS. C. What letter is that ?

DOLLY. Only a note to Gordon Leigh.

MRS. C. (*astounded*). Gordon Leigh! (*Running to the window.*) Violet! Violet! Bring that letter back.

DOLLY. Whatever is the matter?

MRS. C. What have you been writing to Gordon Leigh about?

DOLLY (*calmly*). I 've asked him to call and see me, for one thing.

MRS. C. (*exasperated*). Dolly, you 're a fool.

DOLLY. Why?

MRS. C. Because I told—er—because— Oh, never mind why! (*Going to the door.*) I shall run after Violet and make her give me back that letter.

(MRS. C. *hurries out.*)

DOLLY (*calling after her*). You can't catch her; she 's on her bicycle.

The CURTAIN *falls quickly.*

ACT III

The scene represents a corner of the garden of Bollin Hall. Slightly to the right of the spectator is a large red and white striped square tent, open in front, containing a couple of wicker easy-chairs and a table. Starting behind this tent and stretching diagonally to the right side of the proscenium is a line of trees, through which a path, entered through a trellis-work arch, leads to the house. From the left of the tent a low oak paling with a gate in it runs diagonally to the left side of the proscenium, where it reaches a group of trees or shrubs, which are actually the corner of a shrubbery or plantation, into which a path leads. Over the low paling one can see part of an open field, with pleasant open country in the background. This field is the cricket-field of the Wraysford Cricket Club, though the pitch and pavilion are out of sight to the left. A path crosses from the trellis arch to the gate in the paling, right in front of the tent. Grass covers all the rest of the ground with the exception of a couple of flower-beds, filled with bright, old-fashioned midsummer flowers, one on each side of the gate in the paling. A garden seat is near the trellis arch, and two canvas deck-chairs are on the left, near the path into the shrubbery.

It is a hot sunny afternoon on the same day as the Second Act.

MRS. SCATTERGOOD *is alone in the tent, seated in the left-hand chair, well back out of the reach of the sun. She is placidly dozing, with her hands folded on her lap.* DOLLY, *charmingly dressed in a light summer muslin, comes from the field on the left and strolls to the gate in the paling. She stands a while leaning on it with her back to the cricket-field.* GORDON LEIGH *appears, evidently following* DOLLY. *He sees no one else in sight and quickly comes behind* DOLLY, *throws his arms round her, and drawing her head back kisses her several times on the lips.* DOLLY *wrenches herself free.*

DOLLY (*crying out*). Let me go; oh, let me go!

(*The cry arouses* MRS. SCATTERGOOD, *who instantly wakens up, and straightening in her chair gazes blinking in front of her.*)

GORDON (*surprised*). Dolly!

DOLLY (*seeing who it is, gladly*). Oh, it 's you! I was afraid it was Clarence.

(*At this astonishing speech* MRS. SCATTERGOOD *gives a start, and, cautiously peeping round the side of the tent, is just in time to see* DOLLY *yield herself to another embrace of* GORDON'S. *At the sight* MRS. SCATTERGOOD *is transfixed with horror; she stares at the two until, as they separate, she recollects herself and hastily withdraws her countenance into the tent. Her ears, however, she still makes good use of.*)

GORDON. I got your letter.

DOLLY. Yes, I suppose you did.

GORDON. I waited till I thought your mother would be having her nap——

DOLLY. Why ?

GORDON. I thought it might be wiser. And then I went to your house. You were out ; the maid said you had both gone to the cricket-match. I rushed after you, and as soon as I got on the field I spotted you strolling over here. I didn't waste much time then, I can tell you.

DOLLY. No, you didn't. You frightened me horribly. I thought it was Clarence.

GORDON. But why should *he*—now——

DOLLY. Well—I haven't told him yet.

GORDON. Not told him ?

DOLLY. At least, I 've tried to tell him, but he won't listen.

GORDON. You leave that to me.

DOLLY. No, no. I 've not mentioned *you* yet. I mean he simply won't be reasonable. He pretends to think that it 's just a girlish whim of mine.

GORDON. And you really mean every bit that was in that letter ?

DOLLY. Every word. You didn't think it wrong of me to write it ?

GORDON. I think it was a jolly manly thing to do.

DOLLY (*nodding*). Yes. I 'm sure it was right. Violet thought so too.

GORDON. What had Violet to do with it ?

DOLLY. I 'll tell you everything. But let us sit down somewhere first.

GORDON (*opening the gate*). Suppose we go in this tent?

(MRS. SCATTERGOOD *gives a little start, and hastily composes herself to a profound slumber.*)

DOLLY. No; people are passing every minute from the Hall to the cricket-field. Let us go into the shrubbery. (*She points to her right.*)

GORDON. Can we get into the field again that way?

DOLLY. Oh yes! And there 's a summer-house too; but no one ever goes there because it 's too dirty to sit down.

GORDON. Dirty? What about your dress?

DOLLY (*shyly, looking from her frock to him*). Perhaps you 'll let me sit on your knee.

(GORDON *promptly slips his arm round her waist, and they go off past the deck-chairs into the shrubbery on the left.* MRS. SCATTERGOOD *opens her eyes again and cautiously observes them. When they have disappeared she comes out of the tent, and having glanced round to see that no one is watching, she picks up her dress in both hands and stealthily follows them into the shrubbery, walking very warily. Almost at once* MRS. AMORE *and* MRS. CARTWRIGHT *come from the cricket-field, accompanied by* CLARENCE, *who is in flannels with his legs encased in batting pads. He carries a cricket bat and his batting gloves.*)

MRS. C. Doesn't it make you hot, Clarence, having those pads and things on so long before you go in?

CLARENCE. I like to get used to them. (*He flourishes his bat and tests its springiness.*)

MRS. C. Are you going in first ?

MRS. A. Of course, Mrs. Cartwright, Clarence always goes in first when he plays with the village club. (*Looking into the tent.*) Why, Mrs. Scattergood isn't here !

CLARENCE. Did you expect to find her here ?

MRS. A. She came to sit in the tent because she found the sun rather trying.

MRS. C. Perhaps she 's gone into the house.

MRS. A. Shall we walk on and see ?

MRS. C. If you like. But I want to see Clarence batting. (*To him.*) When do you start again ?

CLARENCE. It will take them another quarter of an hour to get tea over, I expect.

MRS. C. Plenty of time, then. Are you coming with us ?

CLARENCE. No ; I 'll go back to the pavilion.

MRS. A. Clarence always makes a point of mixing with the team. They appreciate it very highly, I can assure you.

MRS. C. I 'm sure they do. (MRS. AMORE *and* MRS. CARTWRIGHT *go through the trellis arch on the right, towards the house.* CLARENCE *takes a cigarette-case from the pocket of his college blazer, puts a cigarette in his mouth, and lights it. He turns towards the gate.* MRS. SCATTERGOOD *emerges from the shrubbery.*)

CLARENCE. Hello, Mrs. Scattergood, where have you been ? Studying natural history in the shrubbery ?

MRS. S. (*disconcerted*). Yes—er—that is, I have been

strolling. (*In an aggrieved tone.*) The trees are very thick in there.

CLARENCE. My mother and Mrs. Cartwright have gone up to the house to look for you. I 'll call them back.

MRS. S. One moment. I should like to have a few minutes' conversation with you, if I may ?

CLARENCE. Certainly. (MRS. S. *sits on a chair which* CLARENCE *draws out of the tent for her.*)

MRS. S. Thank you. Ahem ! (*She is at a loss to proceed.*) Er—have you been winning ?

CLARENCE (*politely*). It is rather too soon to say. Tottington made 132. We have yet to go in.

MRS. S. I see. (*A pause.*) The matter I wish to discuss is of a delicate nature.

CLARENCE. Indeed ? (*He sits in a deck-chair.*)

MRS. S. Many women would shrink from it ; but I conceive it to be my duty to speak, and I hope I shall never shrink from fulfilling what I conceive to be a duty, however unpleasant it may be.

CLARENCE. I 'm sure you won't.

MRS. S. Thank you. I will perform my disagreeable task as briefly as possible. A little while ago I was sitting here in this tent, alone.

CLARENCE. Alone ; yes ?

MRS. S. I was dozing ; the heat of the sun always induces drowsiness, I find. All at once I was awakened by a peculiar noise outside the tent. Naturally I looked round to discover the cause. (*Impressively.*) What do you think I saw ?

CLARENCE. I haven't the least idea.

MRS. S. Gordon Leigh and Dolly Cartwright in each other's arms. He was kissing her.

(*Having delivered this information with her eyes fixed on* CLARENCE'S, MRS. SCATTERGOOD *delicately averts her head and gazes in front of her with pursed lips.* CLARENCE *gives a mighty start; his cigarette drops from his fingers, and he opens his mouth to speak. Then, controlling himself, he stares at* MRS. S. *and reflects.*)

CLARENCE (*leaning forward in his chair*). You saw Leigh kissing Dorothy ?

MRS. S. I did.

CLARENCE. Did she make any—any objection ?

MRS. S. She seemed to like it.

CLARENCE. Was that all you saw ?

MRS. S. There wasn't anything else to see. I heard what they said.

CLARENCE. What did they say ?

MRS. S. It was all very vague. There was something about a letter, and something about you, but I could make nothing of it.

CLARENCE. Where did they go ?

MRS. S. Into the shrubbery.

CLARENCE. The shrubbery ? That 's where *you 've* been !

MRS. S. Er—yes. I went, to—to——

CLARENCE (*bitterly*). To see if you could hear anything more ?

MRS. S. Certainly not. I followed them so that I should be perfectly certain it *was* Dolly and Mr. Leigh.

CLARENCE (*eagerly*). Then you *weren't* certain it was ?

MRS. S. I *was* certain.

CLARENCE. Then why follow them ?

MRS. S. I wanted to be *absolutely* certain.

(CLARENCE *sinks back in his chair, overcome.* MRS. S. *still looks stonily in front of her.* CLARENCE *rises and goes up to the gate, so that the tent masks him from* MRS. S. *In this secure position he exhibits signs of discomposure. He runs his fingers through his hair, takes out his handkerchief, and mops his brow. Becoming calmer, he seems to reflect, looking from the shrubbery to* MRS. S. *and then towards the cricket-field. At last* MRS. S. *rises sedately. An idea seems to strike* CLARENCE.)

MRS. S. It can do no more good for me to remain, I think.

CLARENCE (*coming forward quickly*). Mrs. Scattergood, this chance discovery of yours forces me to tell you something which I had not intended to make public just yet.

MRS. S. Indeed!

CLARENCE. Your news does not surprise me; or rather, it may surprise me, but it does not interest me in the least.

MRS. S. What?

CLARENCE. I am no longer engaged to Dorothy Cartwright.

MRS. S. You were engaged this morning.

CLARENCE. I repeat that our engagement is at an end.

MRS. S. (*in a flutter*). You don't say so? Whatever induced you— (*She stops and thinks.*) Oh, I see! It was Dolly who threw you over for Gordon Leigh.

CLARENCE (*drawing in his breath sharply as if stabbed*). Mrs. Scattergood, I will not— (*He stops and changes his angry tone for a more polite one.*) It was I who broke off the engagement.

MRS. S. You ? It is very difficult to believe that after what I saw going on here recently.

CLARENCE (*hotly*). Do you accuse me of telling a lie ?

MRS. S. I should never dream of accusing you, whatever I might think. But I can't quite understand it all.

CLARENCE. You may perhaps understand it better when I tell you that I am going to marry Violet Fenny.

MRS. S. Really ! Ah, now I begin to see things more clearly. Violet Fenny ! Do you know that the late Rector always said that you would marry Violet !

CLARENCE. Indeed ! Then at least one of his prophecies will be fulfilled.

MRS. S. But what is Dolly doing here, *now* ; and Mrs. Cartwright too ?

CLARENCE. It is a secret at present. Mrs. Cartwright doesn't know anything about it.

MRS. S. Doesn't she ? Poor thing.

CLARENCE. I intend to tell her on the first opportunity.

MRS. S. How upset she will be.

CLARENCE (*looking towards the house*). Hush ! I think I see Mrs. Cartwright coming now.

MRS. S. A splendid opportunity for you. I will leave you alone together and go into the shrubbery.

(MRS. S. *hurries off through the gate into the shrubbery.* MRS. CARTWRIGHT *appears through the trellis arch.*)

MRS. C. Still here, Clarence! We can't find Mrs. Scattergood anywhere. Your mother has ordered some tea, but I wouldn't stop for it. I was determined to see you bat.

CLARENCE. Very kind of you, I 'm sure.

(MRS. C. *sinks cosily into* MRS. SCATTERGOOD'S *chair.*)

By the way, I have been wishing to speak to you for some time, about—about Dorothy.

MRS. C. (*immediately aroused*). Dorothy?

CLARENCE. She has made me very uneasy lately. She has behaved so strangely. At times, if it did not seem incredible, I could almost believe that I am personally distasteful to her.

MRS. C. Oh, but that 's impossible!

CLARENCE. I hope it is. However, I have made up my mind, Mrs. Cartwright, and I should like you to know, before anybody else——

MRS. C. Stop; one moment, Clarence. I have noticed this—er—restlessness in Dolly, and I should like to tell you that it is partly your fault.

CLARENCE (*injured*). Really?

MRS. C. I don't mean anything that you have *done*, I mean something that you have *not* done. You ought to have married Dolly some time ago.

CLARENCE. So that she couldn't get away if she wanted; is that what you mean?

MRS. C. Well, partly; only you put it rather crudely. Engagements ought to be very short or very long. So short that you get married before you are tired

of each other, or so long that they become a habit that you can't break off. Now I quite agree with you that Dolly has been a little difficult to deal with lately. But you mustn't take it too much to heart; as I say, it is perfectly natural.

CLARENCE. It may be natural, but it 's not very pleasant.

MRS. C. (*slightly alarmed*). On the cricket-field not half an hour ago I was talking most seriously to Dolly about this very thing. I said: 'You are causing Clarence pain, my dear.'

CLARENCE (*moodily*). You were right.

MRS. C. In fact I spoke so strongly and—er—feelingly that she quite gave way and admitted she had been wrong. She said: 'I love Clarence, of course, better than any one in the world——'

CLARENCE (*shouting*). What?

MRS. C. I beg your pardon?

CLARENCE (*excited*). When was this?

MRS. C. About half an hour ago.

CLARENCE. Half an— (*He stands dumbfoundered.*)

MRS. C. (*watching him curiously and deciding he wants just a little more managing*). She said: 'I know I 've been strange with Clarence, but it is because I feel that I 'm so far below him. He is so clever, and noble, and—and—et cetera, that I begin to wonder whether I 'm worthy of him.'

CLARENCE (*hurriedly drawing the other arm-chair very near to* MRS. C. *and sitting down in it*). Did she say that?

MRS. C. Those were her very words.

CLARENCE. And she has been afraid that she is not good enough for me?

MRS. C. An absurd scruple, is it not? But we Cartwrights are so conscientious.

CLARENCE. You are absolutely certain you have not misunderstood Dorothy?

MRS. C. Absolutely. (*She watches him closely.*) I hope this has reassured you.

CLARENCE. Yes, yes. (*He rises and takes a turn or two on the grass, hands in pockets, reflecting. Then he stands still and contemplates the tent.*) (*Suddenly.*) Mrs. Cartwright, suppose you went to sleep in this tent on a summer afternoon, do you think that you would be likely to dream?

MRS. C. I rarely dream, even at night. I never take suppers, you see.

CLARENCE. I wasn't thinking of you, particularly. Any one?

MRS. C. It would be possible, I suppose. A dream only lasts a few seconds, they say.

CLARENCE (*half to himself*). Most extraordinary! (*A pause.*) Gordon Leigh has come back, it appears.

MRS. C. Yes. He got back yesterday, I believe. He called to see me this morning.

CLARENCE. Ah yes!

MRS. C. Dolly wasn't up.

CLARENCE (*trying to be indifferent*). Then Dorothy hasn't seen him?

MRS. C. She was in bed when he called this morning.

CLARENCE (*very much brighter*). Ah, lazy girl! (*He lights a cigarette and smokes with enjoyment.*)

MRS. C. Now I must try and find Mrs. Scattergood. Your mother is waiting for her to have tea.

CLARENCE. Funny where she 's got to! I say, Mrs.

Cartwright, between ourselves, what is your opinion of Mrs. Scattergood ?

MRS. C. (*looking round warily*). She 's an old gossip.

CLARENCE. Do you believe she would maliciously exaggerate anything ?

MRS. C. I 'm sure she would.

CLARENCE. Or even invent a story deliberately ?

MRS. C. She 's quite capable of it, I believe.

CLARENCE. So do I.

(*The* RECTOR *appears from the cricket-field.*)

RECTOR. Ah, here you are, Amore! My dear fellow, they are all waiting for you. You are in first, you know.

CLARENCE. Good heavens, I 'd forgotten ! I 'm very sorry.

(*He hastily picks up his bat and gloves.*)

MRS. C. I must come and watch you.

CLARENCE. Have you had tea ?

RECTOR. No ; there was no tea left. These village cricketers are thirsty men.

CLARENCE. You 'd better go and have a cup at the Hall with my mother.

RECTOR. Thank you, I will.

MRS. C. (*going through the gate*). Do, Mr. Fenny, she 's all alone.

(CLARENCE *follows* MRS. C., *but as she disappears he returns and speaks quickly to the* RECTOR.)

CLARENCE. If you see Mrs. Scattergood tell her I want to speak to her.

RECTOR. Certainly.

CLARENCE. It 's rather important. (*He hurries away.*)

(*The* RECTOR *is slowly strolling across to the trellis arch when* MRS. SCATTERGOOD *comes out of the shrubbery.*)

MRS. S. (*calling*). Mr. Fenny!

RECTOR (*turning*). Ah, Mrs. Scattergood! Come up to the Hall with me and have some tea.

MRS. S. With pleasure. (*She stands and smiles broadly at him and nods meaningly. He is rather surprised.*)

MRS. S. (*playfully shaking her finger at him*). Aha! aha! Mr. Fenny.

RECTOR (*alarmed*). Mrs. Scattergood!

MRS. S. I suppose you are feeling very pleased with yourself to-day?

RECTOR. Pleased? Er—I don't know. Tottington made 132; a good score on this wicket.

MRS. S. (*playfully*). Don't pretend to misunderstand me. I mean about Violet's engagement.

RECTOR. Violet's engagement!

MRS. S. Come, come; surely it isn't a secret to an old friend like me. I've heard about it already from Clarence.

RECTOR. Clarence has told you that my daughter is engaged?

MRS. S. Yes.

RECTOR. What does Clarence know about it?

MRS. S. I should say he ought to know better than any one else.

RECTOR. I entirely fail to understand what you are talking about. Violet engaged! Who to?

MRS. S. Why, to Clarence, of course.

RECTOR. To Clarence! (*He sits down and wipes his brow with his handkerchief, staring at her.*)

You are surely labouring under a misapprehension ?

MRS. S. Not in the least. Clarence has just told me he is going to marry Violet.

RECTOR. I know nothing about it. (VIOLET *appears strolling from the cricket-field.*) I must speak to Violet at once.

MRS. S. Here she is.

RECTOR. Will you leave me alone with her ?

MRS. S. Certainly. Too bad to keep you in the dark. I will go and have tea with Mrs. Amore. I must tell her all about it.

(*With a little amiable sign to* VIOLET, MRS. SCATTERGOOD *goes off through the trellis arch.*)

RECTOR (*rising*). Violet, I want to speak to you.

VIOLET. Yes, father. (*She has come through the gate.*)

RECTOR. Have you anything to tell me ?

VIOLET (*in surprise*). I don't think so.

RECTOR. Think again, my child, think again.

VIOLET. About Clarence ?

RECTOR. Yes, yes.

VIOLET. Oh, I thought you knew! He was clean bowled first ball.

RECTOR. No, no, no ! I mean about your engagement.

VIOLET. Engagement !

RECTOR (*in desperation*). Has Clarence asked you to marry him ?

VIOLET (*after a pause, in which she looks at the* RECTOR *steadily*). No, he has not.

(*The* RECTOR *throws up his arms in despair, sits down, and again mops his brow.*)

RECTOR. I always suspected Mrs. Scattergood of gross exaggeration. Has anything happened at all ?

VIOLET. I believe that the engagement between Dolly and Clarence may be broken off.

RECTOR. Ah ! And what about you ?

VIOLET. Clarence is fond of me, I am sure.

RECTOR. Very well, then——

VIOLET. But he has not proposed to me.

RECTOR. Mrs. Scattergood says that he told her he had. Are you quite sure you haven't forgotten anything ?

VIOLET. I am certain that he hasn't asked me to marry him. Indeed, he may never do. (*Suddenly she finds the strain rather too great, and quickly going into the tent she sits down in the sole remaining chair and begins to cry.*)

RECTOR (*uncomfortably*). There, there, my dear, you mustn't give way. Of course it 's a very trying position for you ; very trying. But we must hope for the best. I must go and stop Mrs. Scattergood spreading this story of your engagement until we know something definite.

(*The* RECTOR *quickly goes off through the trellis arch.* VIOLET'S *sobs grow slighter and she regains her composure.* CLARENCE *comes into sight from the cricket-field, without his pads and gloves. At the gate he strikes a match and lights a cigarette.* VIOLET, *hearing the match, looks out of the tent and sees him. Very hastily she dries her eyes and brightens up, evidently expecting something pleasant to happen.* CLARENCE *strolls*

across the front of the tent and sees VIOLET *with surprise.*)

CLARENCE. Hello, Violet! All alone?

VIOLET. All alone. Are you coming to sit with me?

CLARENCE. Well, I was looking for Mrs. Scattergood; but as I can't find her I may as well stay here. You don't mind my cigarette?

VIOLET (*warmly*). No, I like it, very much.

(*A pause.* VIOLET *waiting expectantly.*)

CLARENCE. Did you see me bowled first ball?

VIOLET. Yes. (*Sympathetically.*) I *was* sorry.

CLARENCE. Can't be helped; these things happen to the best of us. That fast left-hander of theirs is one of the worst bowlers I 've ever seen. All long hops and full pitchers that wouldn't get me out as a rule till I 'd made my century. But now and then, by a fluke, he sends down a magnificent ball, a ball that would bowl Maclaren. It was one of those that got me. (*A pause.*) But I 'm sure you don't care about cricket. What else shall we talk about? What would you *like* me to talk about?

VIOLET (*looking down, half laughing, nervously*). Well— (*She stops short and looks him straight in the eyes without saying anything. A pause.* CLARENCE, *feeling uncomfortable, gets up and moves a little away.*)

CLARENCE. Have you—er—had tea?

VIOLET (*on the point of breaking down, overwrought by disappointment*). No. (*Going out of the tent quickly towards the gate in the paling.*) No, I don't want any tea.

(*She stands at the gate with her back to* CLARENCE *to hide her emotion.*)

CLARENCE (*at length*). I wonder where Dorothy is. You haven't seen her, have you ?

(VIOLET *does not answer. Her shoulders flutter convulsively, and without speaking or turning her head she goes quickly through the gate and turns to the left into the cricket-field.* CLARENCE, *a little puzzled, follows her to the gate and gazes after her.* MRS. AMORE *comes quickly through the trellis arch, her ribbons all in a flutter.*)

MRS. A. Oh, Clarence ! Is it true ?

CLARENCE. Is what true ?

MRS. A. Mrs. Scattergood says you are going to marry Violet Fenny.

CLARENCE (*losing his control*). Damnation and fury !

MRS. A. Clarence ! (*She gazes apprehensively at him.*)

(CLARENCE *takes a turn up towards the back of the tent, ruffling his hair in his agitation.*)

CLARENCE. I beg your pardon, mother. Is it *likely* to be true ?

MRS. A. I don't know. You never tell me anything. And it is *so* embarrassing, I don't know whom to congratulate.

CLARENCE. Congratulate ?

MRS. A. On being engaged to you.

CLARENCE. Why on earth should you congratulate *any one* on being engaged to me ?

MRS. A. I don't know, dear ; isn't it the proper thing to do ?

CLARENCE. But I 'm engaged to Dorothy ; I always have been.

MRS. A. Mrs. Scattergood says that——

CLARENCE. Never mind what Mrs. Scattergood says. I am engaged to Dorothy, and I haven't the least intention of marrying Violet Fenny. Now, for Heaven's sake, mother, go and find Mrs. Scattergood and stop with her all afternoon! Don't let her tell this idiotic story to any one else.

MRS. A. (*obediently*). Very well, Clarence. (*As she goes.*) I hope she hasn't told the Rector. (MRS. A. *goes through the trellis arch.*)

(CLARENCE *throws himself into a chair, and with elbows on knees and clenched teeth stares at the ground, considering his position.* DOLLY *peeps out of the shrubbery, and, seeing* CLARENCE *alone, comes out.*)

DOLLY. Clarence.

CLARENCE (*looking up*). Dorothy, my dearest! I 've been looking for you everywhere.

DOLLY. I want to speak to you very seriously.

CLARENCE. You don't need. I know everything.

DOLLY. You know?

CLARENCE. Yes, your mother has told me.

DOLLY. But mother doesn't know.

CLARENCE. You forget. You told her on the cricket-field. (*Attempting to take her hand.*) Don't let us talk about it, dearest. It was only a passing cloud. We 'll forget all about it for ever.

DOLLY (*evading his hand*). Please, Clarence, let me explain myself. I spoke to you at home this morning. I tried to speak to you this afternoon on the cricket-field. You wouldn't listen to me; you *must* listen to me now.

CLARENCE (*startled*). Well ?

DOLLY. You must give me back my promise to marry you.

CLARENCE. Are you mad, Dorothy ? When will you know your own mind ?

DOLLY. My mind is the same now as it was this morning.

CLARENCE. But Mrs. Cartwright told me that you didn't mean what you said this morning.

DOLLY (*contemptuously*). Mother ? Oh, mother wouldn't mind what she said if she thought she could smooth things over between us !

CLARENCE. Do you mean to say that she has deceived me, made a fool of me ?

DOLLY. I 'm afraid she has been telling you fibs. (*He is dumb.*) In any case, I don't think you have any right to taunt me with not knowing my own mind, after what you said to Violet Fenny this morning.

CLARENCE. How do you know what I said to Violet Fenny ?

DOLLY. She told me.

CLARENCE. Ah, now I see ! You 're jealous ; that 's what it is ; you 're jealous of Violet Fenny. (*He laughs.*) Poor Violet, you never thought of *her* as a rival, did you ?

DOLLY. Not a rival ; a successor.

CLARENCE. How foolish, Dorothy. That was wrong of you. Poor Violet is a very old friend of mine. I am fond of her, of course, but as a wife— (*He laughs at the very idea.*)

DOLLY. Clarence, will you please understand that our engagement is at an end ?

CLARENCE. No.

DOLLY (*wildly*). Then I break it myself. I break my word to you.

CLARENCE (*madly*). You shan't, Dorothy; I 'll never let you go.

(*He fiercely takes her in his arms and kisses her again and again in spite of her struggles.*)

DOLLY (*screaming*). Let me go! Let me go!

CLARENCE (*tensely*). Never, while I live.

(GORDON LEIGH *steps out of the shrubbery.*)

GORDON (*coolly*). I think you 'd better, Amore.

(CLARENCE *stares across* DOLLY'S *shoulder at* GORDON, *and gradually releases her. She turns to* GORDON, *who quietly puts his arm round her.*)

(*There is a long pause.*)

DOLLY. I don't need to say anything more, do I?

CLARENCE. No, you don't need to say anything more.

(*A slight pause.*)

DOLLY. Gordon and I have agreed not to announce our engagement for some time. Perhaps a couple of months.

(CLARENCE *raises his head hopefully.*)

It is the only amends I can make you for treating you so unkindly.

CLARENCE (*ironically*). You show a great consideration for my feelings.

DOLLY. Frankly, it *is* out of regard for your feelings that we are doing this. I know your sensitiveness to public opinion.

CLARENCE (*bitterly*). Where shall one look for fidelity?

(*A pause follows.* VIOLET FENNY *appears in sight. She slowly strolls along the fence*

inside the cricket-field, beginning at the shrubbery end and passing the gate, and goes out of sight behind the tent. She is evidently walking alone round the field. She does not turn her head, and does not observe the three in the garden. As she passes CLARENCE *sees her, and at the sight straightens up. He gazes after her.*)

CLARENCE. You will excuse me. Good afternoon.

(*He goes out of the gate in a dignified way, and, having passed through it, hurries after* VIOLET, *who is already out of sight.*)

DOLLY (*sighing with satisfaction*). Thank goodness, that 's over! Do you know, Gordon, you never opened your mouth. Why not ?

GORDON. The sight of me was enough, I suppose.

DOLLY. Still, you might have said something nice to poor Clarence.

GORDON. Never kick a man when he 's down. If I 'd said anything nice he 'd have hit me in the face.

DOLLY. Clarence wouldn't do a thing like that.

GORDON. I know I should, in his situation.

DOLLY. Perhaps that 's why I like you better.

(MRS. CARTWRIGHT *appears at the gate, coming from the cricket-field. At the sight of* DOLLY *and* GORDON *she starts with annoyance.*)

MRS. C. (*coolly*). Good afternoon, Mr. Leigh. (*Sharply.*) What are you doing here, Dolly ?

DOLLY. Oh ! is that you, mother ? Come in ; I have something to tell you.

MRS. C. (*suspiciously*). What is it ?

DOLLY. I have broken off my engagement with Clarence, and I am going to marry Gordon Leigh.

MRS. C. (*angrily*). Dolly !

DOLLY. Please, mother ! It isn't any use making a scene.

MRS. C. I have no intention of making a scene. I know that you are sufficiently my daughter to get your own way when your mind is made up, whatever means you may use to get it.

GORDON. Hold hard, Mrs. Cartwright !

MRS. C. Dolly has deceived Clarence most shamefully.

GORDON. I think she has behaved in a perfectly straight manner. And while we are talking about—deceit, you called it, I should like to ask you about the message you gave me this morning from Dolly.

MRS. C. (*flinching*). Well ?

GORDON. It appears she never gave you any message.

DOLLY. And you told Clarence something about me, this afternoon, which was not in the least true.

MRS. C. You are both quite right. I have told two deliberate lies to-day, and I would tell any number of lies for your good, Dolly.

DOLLY. Thank you. Unfortunately we have different opinions about what is good for me.

MRS. C. A middle-class girl, like you, who is not rich, has to get married simply by the aid of her face and her figure. It is the duty of a mother to see that her daughter makes the best possible bargain. Now I was of opinion that Clarence Amore, with three thousand pounds a year and Bollin Hall, was a much better bargain than you, Mr. Leigh, with—with—er——

GORDON. Three-fifty.

MRS. C. (*wincing*). Three hundred and fifty a year! And I was prepared to do anything, short of murder, to make a good match for Dolly. Do you think I 'd stick at a few lies? Of course not. Well, I 'm still of opinion that Dolly has made a bad bargain; but it 's *made*, in spite of me. There 's no more to be said; I must accept the inevitable. Let 's shake hands and be friends. Gordon, you can come and kiss me.

(GORDON *obediently kisses* MRS. C. DOLLY, *after a moment's hesitation, also throws her arms round her mother's neck and kisses her.*)

DOLLY. You did it all for the best. But you forgot to say anything about Love, mother.

MRS. C. I didn't forget. I didn't think it worth mentioning.

DOLLY (*pleasantly*). That 's where you make a mistake.

(*Slipping her arm in* GORDON'S, *she goes with him up to the gate. Then she turns.*)

DOLLY. By the way, mother, we are not announcing our engagement for at least two months.

MRS. C. Why not?

DOLLY. For Clarence's sake. It would look as if I had thrown him over for Gordon, and that would hurt him terribly. Promise to keep it secret.

MRS. C. Very well. (*Seeing* GORDON *look doubtful.*) It 's all right; I shan't break my word. There 's no inducement this time.

(DOLLY *and* GORDON *go away into the field.*)

(*Very soon* MRS. SCATTERGOOD'S *voice is heard, coming from the direction of the house.*)

MRS. S. We must find Clarence. That is the only thing.

MRS. A. But I assure you——

RECTOR. The whole affair is incomprehensible to me.

(MRS. SCATTERGOOD, *followed by* MRS. AMORE *and the* RECTOR, *come through the trellis arch.*)

MRS. S. Here is Mrs. Cartwright. She must know.

RECTOR. No, no, we can hardly ask *her*.

MRS. C. What is that, Mrs. Scattergood ?

MRS. A. Merely a little dispute.

MRS. S. (*determinedly*). I 'm sure it concerns Mrs. Cartwright as much as any of us.

RECTOR. More than some of us, doubtless.

MRS. C. Then let me hear it.

RECTOR. It is of a delicate nature.

MRS. A. It 's no use, Mrs. Cartwright; I suppose you will have to hear about it. Mrs. Scattergood persists in saying that Clarence is going to marry Violet.

MRS. C. Marry Violet !

MRS. S. Clarence himself told me.

MRS. A. But Clarence himself told me that he is going to marry Dorothy.

MRS. C. I can inform you definitely that Clarence is *not* going to marry Dolly, at any rate.

MRS. S. I told you so.

MRS. A. But I had it from his lips——

MRS. S. He 's going to marry Violet.

RECTOR (*bewildered*). Ladies, ladies, I assure you Violet knows nothing of it.

MRS. A. But, Mrs. Cartwright, what authority have you for saying that the engagement is broken ?

MRS. C. Dolly told me.

RECTOR. Now stop a moment. Let us reason it out. Dolly tells Mrs. Cartwright it is off. Clarence tells his mother it is on. Clarence tells Mrs. Scattergood that he is engaged to Violet. Violet tells me he has never asked her!

MRS. A. Where are we?

RECTOR. I give it up.

MRS. S. (*rubbing her hands gleefully*). I don't think I have ever come across such a remarkable affair before.

MRS. C. There is only one course open. Ask Clarence whom he is going to marry.

MRS. A. That 's what we want to do.

RECTOR. But where is Clarence?

MRS. S. We can't find him.

MRS. C. Then we shall have to wait until he turns up.

(*They are sitting in a semicircle, with their backs to the tent.* MRS. C. *is nearest the shrubbery.* CLARENCE *and* VIOLET, *arm-in-arm, appear at the top of the palings—where they both disappeared previously—and come to the gate. They are unobserved.*)

MRS. S. (*after a slight pause*). One thing is certain. Some one has thrown some one else over. Either Dolly has jilted Clarence, or——

(CLARENCE *clicks the gate loudly. They all turn and look at* CLARENCE *and* VIOLET.)

CLARENCE. I think you were all talking about me. (*No one speaks.*) Mrs. Cartwright, you ought to know that I have broken off my engagement with Dorothy.

(*The* RECTOR *and* MRS. AMORE *are surprised,* MRS. SCATTERGOOD *nods,* MRS. CARTWRIGHT *raises her eyebrows.*)

Mr. Fenny, I have to ask your permission to consider myself engaged to Violet.

RECTOR (*embarrassed*). My dear Amore, with the—er—(*looking at* MRS. CARTWRIGHT)—the greatest pleasure. (CLARENCE *shakes hands with the* RECTOR.)

MRS. S. I congratulate you both.

MRS. A. Violet.

(VIOLET *kisses* MRS. AMORE, *and then goes to her father, who embraces her.*)

(CLARENCE *is near* MRS. CARTWRIGHT; *he turns to her as if to address her, but hesitates.*)

(MRS. C. *looks at him cynically, and, anticipating his speech, she says in a distinct undertone.*)

MRS. C. I 'm a bit of a liar myself.

(CLARENCE *shrinks back and looks at the others, but no one has heard the remark.*)

The CURTAIN *falls.*

THE YOUNGER GENERATION

A COMEDY FOR PARENTS

CHARACTERS

James Henry Kennion (*the Father*).

Mrs. Kennion (*the Mother*).

Maggie (*Maid at Mr. Kennion's*).

Reggie Kennion.

Grace Kennion.

Thomas Kennion (*the Uncle*).

Mr. Leadbitter } (*of the Longton Park*
Mr. Fowle } *Liberal Association*).

Arthur Kennion.

Mrs. Hannah Kennion (*the Grandmother*).

Clifford Rawson.

Scene.—*The Dining-room of* James Henry Kennion's *House in Longton Park, a suburb of the large manufacturing town of Salchester.*

The action takes place at the present day, within the space of twenty-four hours.

Act I.—*Saturday evening.*

Act II.—*Sunday morning.*

Act III.—*Sunday afternoon.*

THE YOUNGER GENERATION

ACT I

NOTE.—*In the description of the scene, and the stage directions, the terms* '*Right*' *and* '*Left*' *are used from the spectator's point of view, not the actor's.*

The dining-room of MR. KENNION'S *house is a large oblong room, comfortable and well furnished. The fireplace is supposed to be in the fourth wall nearest the spectator; that is to say, in the middle of the row of footlights. A fender and fire-irons are seen; also the red glow from the fire. The door is to the right of the opposite wall, facing the spectator, and in the left of that wall there is a bow window recess, which contains a table and two chairs. In the left-hand wall is an ordinary window with a sofa in front of it, and nearer the spectator is a writing-desk and a chair. Against the right-hand wall is the sideboard, and lower down a small table and a chair. The oblong dining-table, with its longer side toward the spectator, is in the middle of the room, with a chair at each end and two on each side, pushed well under. Two arm-chairs face the fire, one on each side of the hearth-rug. A bowl of chrysanthemums is on the dining-table, and a plant in a pot on the sideboard. The space of wall between the door and the bow window is occupied by an engraving of a picture by a Russian artist of* '*Christ*

Before Pilate,' and other good engravings are on the walls.

The blinds are drawn, the fire is burning, and the electric lights are on, as it is late on a Saturday evening in autumn.

When the curtain rises MR. *and* MRS. KENNION *are alone in the room. He is a middle-sized, pleasant, firm-looking man of fifty-three, with a neat moustache. He is going grey. She is a kindly, decided, plump woman of fifty. Both are thoroughly kind, well-meaning, and honourable, though a trifle too strict in their attitude to their children.* MR. KENNION *is, if anything, more lenient with* GRACE, *and* MRS. KENNION *with the boys.*

MR. *and* MRS. KENNION *are sitting cosily in front of the fire.* MR. KENNION *is in the left-hand arm-chair. He is reading the 'Nation,' and smokes a big brier pipe. Copies of the 'Daily News' and the 'Salchester Guardian' lie rumpled up at his feet.* MRS. KENNION *is in the right-hand arm-chair, reading the 'Strand Magazine.' They read for a short time.*

MR. KENNION. I haven't heard the boys come in, Alice. Have you ?

MRS. KENNION (*looking up*). No, I don't think I have, James.

MR. K. (*looking at his watch*). It 's late ; after half-past ten. (*He grunts and they resume reading.*)

(MAGGIE, *a bonny, well-built housemaid, enters with a letter on a salver, and looks round.*)

MR. K. A letter, Maggie ?

MAGGIE. For Miss Grace, sir.

MR. K. (*rather drily*). Ah !

(MAGGIE *places the letter prominently on the sideboard, leaning against a plant-pot.* MR. *and* MRS. KENNION *resume their reading meanwhile, but as soon as* MAGGIE *has gone out and closed the door, they both turn and gaze at the letter. Then they look at each other.* MR. KENNION, *after a moment's hesitation, gets up and goes to the sideboard and examines the letter. He takes it in his hand and then passes it to his wife, who examines the address.*)

MR. K. It 's the same handwriting as the other letters.

MRS. K. Yes. I ought to know it. I 've seen it somewhere.

MR. K. There 's no doubt it 's a man's.

MRS. K. Don't you think we ought to open it, James ?

MR. K. (*taking it from her*). No, no ; we 'd better not do that.

MRS. K. What shall you do, then ?

MR. K. I shall ask Grace to show it to me.

MRS. K. Suppose she refuses ?

MR. K. Then I shall *make* her show it to me.

MRS. K. Well, if you 're going to make her show it you, you might just as well open it yourself.

MR. K. That wouldn't be quite honourable, Alice. I would never think of opening Grace's letters—unless——

MRS. K. Unless ?

MR. K. Unless she refused to show them to me. (*He replaces the letter and sits down again to the 'Nation.'* MRS. KENNION *also reads again.*)

(REGGIE KENNION *enters; a nice-looking, slim, irresponsible boy of nineteen, wearing a big overcoat and cap and carrying a hockey-bag. He flings the bag down, takes off his cap, and unbuttons his coat.*)

REGGIE. Hello! All alone?

MRS. K. Well, Reggie. Did you win?

REGGIE. Win? I should jolly well think so. Walked round them.

MR. K. Where 's Arthur?

REGGIE. I don't know.

MRS. K. Haven't you seen him?

REGGIE. No. He 's been playing for the second, at home. I 've been playing at Liverpool.

MR. K. You 're very late.

REGGIE. Hang it all, dad, it 's only just after ten.

MR. K. It is after half-past ten, Reggie.

REGGIE. I 've had to come from Liverpool.

MR. K. It doesn't take five hours to come from Liverpool.

REGGIE (*in an injured tone*). I had to get something to eat, hadn't I?

MR. K. All right, my boy, I 'm not going to argue about it. (*Kindly.*) You 're old enough to be trusted, but you know I don't like you to be out too late on Saturday night. I can't make out where Arthur is.

MRS. K. (*placidly*). So you had something to eat in Liverpool, Reggie. Where did you go?

REGGIE (*confused*). Oh—er—to a—a—place.

MRS. K. I don't know why you couldn't have come straight home. I could have kept your tea for you.

MR. K. (*trying to be chatty*). Did any of the fellows go with you ?

REGGIE. Only Jones, our left back. He was captain to-day.

MRS. K. Did you go to a confectioner's ?

REGGIE (*slowly*). Er—no.

MRS. K. I could have told you of a very nice confectioner's.

REGGIE. No. A restaurant.

MR. K. Whereabouts ?

REGGIE. Can't say. Don't know Liverpool.

MR. K. What name ?

REGGIE. I forget ; Jones knew it.

MR. K. A teetotal place ?

REGGIE. Oh, I really don't know. What on earth does it matter ?

MRS. K. Now, Reggie, don't be so bad-tempered when people ask you questions.

REGGIE. Well, you 're always bothering me about what I 've been doing and where I 've been. Any one would think there was something wrong in having tea in Liverpool.

(*There is an awkward pause.* MR. KENNION *returns to his paper.* REGGIE *strolls to the sideboard and looks at the letter.*)

MRS. K. (*conversationally*). Whose writing is that, Reggie ?

REGGIE. Clifford Rawson's, isn't it ? (*He goes to door.*)

(MR. *and* MRS. KENNION *look at each other meaningly.*)

MRS. K. Now, Reggie, take those hockey things away. And your cap.

REGGIE. Oh, all right. (*He picks them up.*) I say, dad, I wanted to ask you something.

MR. K. Well, my boy ?

REGGIE (*hesitatingly*). Don't you think I might chuck being secretary of the Sunday-school now ?

MRS. K. Reggie !

MR. K. (*amazed*). You want to give up the secretaryship ? What for ? Do you find the work is too hard ?

REGGIE. No ; but it spoils a Sunday afternoon.

MR. K. You couldn't be better employed on a Sunday afternoon.

REGGIE. Well, of course, that 's a matter of opinion.

MR. K. (*good-temperedly*). Reggie, if you give up the Sunday-school I shall be very grieved.

REGGIE (*grumbling*). It 's enough to make a fellow want to emigrate.

MRS. K. Good gracious, Reggie !

REGGIE. I wish I could go to Canada, like Tommy Leslie.

MR. K. He went because he could do no good here.

MRS. K. And he travelled steerage.

REGGIE. I had a picture postcard from him last week, showing him milking a cow.

MRS. K. (*chaffing*). If you want to milk cows there 's no need to go to Canada.

REGGIE. He 's out in the fields at five every morning.

MR. K. (*also chaffing him*). That wouldn't suit you. I 've hard work to get you up by half-past eight.

REGGIE. Rot ! It 's fine ; it 's a man's life.

(Mr. *and* Mrs. Kennion *go on reading. A pause.*)

Reggie (*at last*). Then I 've got to keep on at the Sunday-school ?

Mr. K. You know perfectly well I don't wish you to give it up.

Reggie (*sulkily*). I shall write and ask Tommy Leslie if he can get me a job in Canada. (*He waits for the result of this bombshell, but it has no effect. So he turns to go out.*)

Mrs. K. (*still reading*). Don't forget to take your hockey-bag with you, Reggie.

(*He picks it up pettishly, and his coat and cap.*)

Mr. K. (*quietly*). You 're not going out again to-night, Reggie ?

Reggie. No, of course not.

(Reggie *goes out.*)

Mrs. K. Reggie's always talking about Canada nowadays. I hope he doesn't mean anything by it.

Mr. K. Rubbish, Alice. If Reggie went to Canada we should have him whining for his passage money back in three months.

Mrs. K. I can't understand what he can see in milking cows.

Mr. K. He only wants to get away from the restrictions of home. It 's a phase all young fellows go through ; I 've been through it myself.

(Grace, *a well-built, capable, handsome girl of nearly twenty-three, comes in with a tray, which contains a coffee-jug, five cups and saucers, biscuits and butter and plates and knives, etc.*)

GRACE. The boys have come in, haven't they ?

MRS. K. Only Reggie.

GRACE. Hasn't Arthur come ? How late he is.

MR. K. (*looking at his watch*). I can't understand it.

MRS. K. I think there 's a letter for you there.

(GRACE *puts the tray on the table and goes to the letter. She glances at it and then tucks it in her belt, unopened.*)

MRS. K. (*placidly*). Who 's it from, dear ?

GRACE (*after a second's hesitation*). From Miss Baker. About the bazaar, I expect.

MR. K. (*sternly, putting down his paper*). Grace, that letter is not from Miss Baker.

GRACE (*startled*). Father !

MR. K. You know it 's not, don't you ? (*She does not answer.*) Come, Grace. (*Still no reply.*) Grace, will you show me that letter ?

GRACE. I don't think you 've any right to insist on seeing my letters, father.

MR. K. (*kindly but firmly*). I am not insisting, Grace. I 'm asking you to allow me.

GRACE. I 'm twenty-two, father.

MR. K. Are you ashamed to show it me ?

(*After a moment's pause* GRACE *quickly hands* MR. KENNION *the letter.*)

GRACE. I 'm certainly not ashamed.

MR. K. Thank you. (*He tears the envelope open.*) Remember, I 'm opening this with your permission, Grace. (*She does not reply. He glances through the letter and then reads it aloud to* MRS. KENNION.)

' DARLING GRACE,—Just a line to tell you that I 'm not going away for the week-end

after all. So I will meet you after Sunday-school, as usual.—Dearest love, your own,

'CLIFFORD.'

(*There is a long pause.*)

GRACE. Can I have my letter, please ?

MR. K. (*giving it her*). It is from Clifford Rawson, I suppose.

GRACE. Yes.

MR. K. Now, will you tell us, your mother and me, how it is that Clifford Rawson comes to be writing a letter like that to you ?

GRACE. He wanted to let me know that he 'd meet me to-morrow, I suppose.

MR. K. 'As usual,' he says. He has been meeting you frequently ?

GRACE. Yes.

MR. K. Why ?

GRACE. Well, father, if you can't understand ! I suppose you used to meet mother.

MRS. K. (*with some heat*). I never met your father secretly, Grace. Especially after teaching a Sunday-school class.

MR. K. You mean that young Rawson and you are fond of each other ?

GRACE. Yes.

MR. K. Are you engaged ?

GRACE. No, not exactly. I told Clifford he 'd have to ask you first.

MR. K. I 'm glad to hear that, at any rate. Well, Grace, I can understand a boy and girl being fond of each other. I can understand your being fond of young Rawson, though I haven't too good an opinion of him myself. But I cannot

understand your meeting him secretly like this, and, above all, your telling me a deliberate lie—a lie—about that letter.

GRACE. It 's entirely your own fault, father.

MR. K. (*amazed*). My fault !

MRS. K. (*scandalised*). Grace !

GRACE. We had to keep it secret because you 're so strict that you never would let me meet a boy alone.

MRS. K. I should think not, indeed !

GRACE. How can you get to know any one well enough to find out you want to be engaged to him unless you see a good deal of him first ?

MR. K. (*slightly puzzled*). You 've always had plenty of opportunities of meeting your brothers' friends here at home, and young men at the tennis club, and—and at the chapel.

GRACE (*quietly*). That 's not quite the same thing, is it ?

(*A slight pause.*)

MR. K. (*rising*). Well, Grace, you 're a woman now, and I can't treat you as I could have done two or three years ago. I shan't say any more about the way you 've gone about this affair, but you 've upset your mother and me very much.

(*He seems to expect an expression of regret, but* GRACE *doesn't speak.*)

However, that 's over and we 'll try and forget all about it. Then I am to understand that Clifford Rawson wants my consent to your engagement ?

GRACE. Yes.

MR. K. Now I don't promise to give it, you understand ?

(GRACE *looks mutinous, as if she will do without it.*)

I shall have to think about it, and talk it over with your mother. And I must speak to Arthur about Clifford ; I must know a great deal more about him than I do at present.

MRS. K. You must see him at once, James.

MR. K. Certainly ; I shall write to-night and ask him to come and see me to-morrow.

GRACE. Will you let me write and ask him, father ?

MR. K. You ? Very well, if you prefer.

GRACE. I do. (*She goes to the door.*) What time to-morrow ?

MR. K. In the afternoon.

GRACE. I 'll write at once. (GRACE *goes out.*)

MRS. K. James ! Who would have believed it ?

MR. K. I 'm sorry to find that Grace has been deceiving us ; but we must be very thankful it's no worse.

MRS. K. You must make inquiries about Clifford.

MR. K. I shall ask Arthur. He 's a friend of Clifford's, and I shall be guided to a great extent by his opinion of his character.

MRS. K. The great thing is to find out whether he 's steady. I *have* heard that he comes home very late sometimes.

MR. K. Arthur will know. We must rely on him.

MRS. K. Where *is* Arthur ? He 's not come in yet.

MR. K. I hope there 's not been an accident.

(MAGGIE *comes in.*)

MAGGIE. If you please, sir, there 's a gentleman to see you.

MR. K. Who is it ?

MAGGIE. He wouldn't give his name, sir. He 's in the hall.

(MR. KENNION *goes out puzzled, followed by* MAGGIE. *His voice is almost immediately heard in the hall, raised in joyous surprise.*)

MR. K. Tom ! Why, good gracious, it 's Tom !

(MRS. KENNION, *who has been listening, rises from her chair, as* MR. KENNION, *like a schoolboy, reappears dragging in* THOMAS KENNION *by the hand.* THOMAS *is a stouter, more genial edition of his brother.*)

MR. K. Alice, look who 's turned up.

MRS. K. Tom ! Well, this *is* a surprise.

TOM. Yes, I meant it to be. (*He greets* MRS. KENNION *heartily.*) I had to come across to London on business, and I wasn't sure whether I should have time to get down here to see you, so I didn't write.

MR. K. It 's five years, Tom, since we saw you last.

TOM. Yes. Time flies, doesn't it ?

MRS. K. It 's too bad of you not to come over oftener. It isn't very far from Hamburg to here.

TOM. It 's no further from here to Hamburg. Why don't you come and see me, Jim, you lazy beggar ?

MR. K. I 've been intending to for years.

TOM. And how are you all ?

MRS. K. Splendid.

TOM. The children ?

MR. K. Tut, tut; they are grown up, you forget.

TOM. By gad, so they are!

MR. K. There 's only Reggie still under twenty-one, and you 'd never guess it from his behaviour.

MRS. K. You 'd like a bit of supper, Tom, I dare say?

TOM. No thanks; I had dinner in the train.

MRS. K. Coffee, then?

TOM. If it 's not troubling you——

MRS. K. Oh, it 's ready here. (MRS. KENNION *pours two cups of coffee.*) We always enjoy a cup of coffee in the evening.

MR. K. What will you smoke, Tom?

TOM. I 'll try some of your tobacco, thanks, Jim.

(MR. KENNION *hands his pouch, and* TOM *fills his pipe.*)

MRS. K. Do you like a feather mattress?

TOM. What for?

MRS. K. To sleep on, of course. I must go and see about your room.

TOM. Don't you trouble. Sleep in the bath if necessary.

MRS. K. It isn't necessary. We have a spare bedroom.

(MRS. KENNION *goes out smiling.*)

TOM (*sitting in the left arm-chair*). I should like to go round to-night and see mother for a few minutes, if it 's not too late.

MR. K. Not at all. She never goes to bed till eleven. A wonderful old woman, Tom.

TOM. Seventy-five last birthday, wasn't she?

MR. K. Seventy-six.

TOM. And she writes to me regularly, once a month.

MR. K. She keeps you well posted up in what 's going on here ?

TOM. Yes. There 's always a bit about you, and a bit about herself, and a good deal about the chapel.

MR. K. She goes to service morning and evening on Sundays. She even kept her Bible-class on until last year.

TOM. Amazing ! Still, I can't help feeling that she seems to regard the chapel as the hub of the universe.

MR. K. It is the principal interest in her life.

TOM. Curious how one gets rid of that point of view living abroad.

MR. K. (*smiling*). That was mother's chief objection to your going abroad at first. Do you remember ?

TOM. Rather. We had a bit of a tussle over it, hadn't we ? Even now I suspect she thinks of Germany as an ungodly place inhabited by rather light-minded people.

MR. K. Well, Tom, you know, we can't exactly approve of the way they spend Sunday in Germany.

TOM (*laughing heartily*). The Continental Sunday, eh ? Ha, ha !

MR. K. (*gravely*). I think the English way is best, Tom.

TOM. Yes; and you think old England's the finest country in the world; and that Salchester, dirty old Salchester, is the most beautiful city in England; and that the chapel's the noblest institution in Salchester.

MR. K. (*very seriously*). Well, Tom, if I do——

Tom (*heartily*). Don't apologise for it. That 's the spirit that has made England what it is.

Mr. K. (*pleased*). Do you really think so ?

Tom (*seriously*). I do. Thank God I haven't got it !

(*Enter* Reggie *very sedately.*)

Reggie. How do you do, Uncle Tom ?

Tom. Hello, young man ! (*Shaking hands.*) It 's Arthur, isn't it ?

Reggie (*pleased*). No, I 'm Reggie. I 'm not surprised at your mistake ; lots of people think I look older than Arthur.

Tom. Reggie, of course ! And where 's Arthur ?

Reggie. Not come in yet.

Mr. K. I can't make out where he 's got to. It 's so late.

Tom. Late ? Why, it isn't eleven yet ! Your hotels and places don't close till eleven, do they ?

Mr. K. (*in amazement*). Hotels ? Why ?

Tom. Thought he might be having a drink somewhere, that 's all.

Mr. K. (*after a pause*). I should be very sorry to think that either Arthur or Reggie was in the habit of frequenting hotels.

Tom (*surprised*). Why, what 's wrong with them ?

Mr. K. Wrong with them ! Wrong with hotels ! Er—well, I suppose there 's nothing wrong with them if they are properly conducted ; but you forget that Arthur and Reggie are only boys.

Reggie. I say, father. I shall be twenty-one in less than two years.

Tom. You 're in a bank, aren't you, Reggie ?

Reggie. Yes.

TOM (*to* MR. KENNION). And Arthur 's still with you at the warehouse ?

MR. K. Yes.

TOM. And how do you like the bank, Reggie ?

REGGIE. Rotten.

TOM. How 's that ?

REGGIE. Oh, there 's no romance about it.

TOM. After all, there isn't intended to be.

REGGIE. What I want is a *man's* life.

TOM. What do you call ' a man's life ' ?

REGGIE (*airily*). Oh, you know. Riding round on a horse and ordering people about.

TOM. You find it slow in the bank ?

REGGIE. Slow 's not the word. And what chance has a fellow of getting on ?

MR. K. You 've the chance of becoming a bank manager in time.

REGGIE. A bank manager ! Now I ask you, Uncle Tom, what is a bank manager ?

TOM. A man who manages a bank, I suppose.

REGGIE. I mean what *sort* of a man ? Why, a fat, bald old beggar with side whiskers. A chap who couldn't kill a grizzly bear to save his life. Couldn't run away from one even. I tell you I 'm sick of Salchester. You don't think you could find me a place in Hamburg, uncle ?

TOM. I 'm afraid even Hamburg wouldn't be exciting enough to suit your requirements.

(MRS. KENNION *enters, followed by* GRACE.)

MRS. K. Tom, here 's Grace.

TOM (*rising*). How d' you do, my dear ? Too big to kiss ?

GRACE (*smiling*). No, uncle. (*She offers him her*

cheek, which he kisses.) How jolly of you to turn up like this.

Tom (*holding her left hand and examining the third finger*). Not engaged yet, I see ?

Grace. No.

Mr. K. Er—no.

(*An awkward pause.* Grace *looks at her father.*)

Tom. You must hurry up, my dear.

Grace (*looking at* Mr. Kennion). I 've sent that letter to the post.

Mr. K. Very well.

Mrs. K. But wherever is Arthur ?

Reggie. Perhaps he 's at Clifford Rawson's.

Mr. K. You 'd better go round and see, if he doesn't turn up soon.

(Maggie *comes in.*)

Maggie. Please, sir, Mr. Leadbitter and Mr. Fowle would like to have a word with you, if it isn't too late.

Mr. K. Leadbitter and Fowle. Certainly. Ask them to come in.

Tom. Look here, I 'll slip round to see mother now.

Mr. K. Very well; it 's only round the corner; she 's moved, you know.

Grace. Reggie and I will go with you, uncle, and show you the way.

Tom. Right you are.

(Maggie *shows in* Mr. Leadbitter, *a thin, ascetic, doctrinaire person ; and* Mr. Fowle, *a stout, fleshy, rubicund man.*)

Mr. K. (*shaking hands with them*). How do you do ?

Mr. Lead. Good evening, Mrs. Kennion.

MR. FOWLE (*genially*). Hope we don't intrude so late.

MRS. K. Not at all.

MR. K. Let me introduce my brother from Germany, Mr. Thomas Kennion; Mr. Leadbitter and Mr. Fowle.

MR. LEAD. (*shaking hands*). Very pleased to meet you, sir.

MR. FOWLE (*jovially*). Tom Kennion! (*Taking his hand.*) I remember giving you a black eye when we were at the Grammar School together.

TOM. I think it was *I* who gave *you* the black eye.

MR. FOWLE. Was it? Perhaps you 're right. I forget.

MR. LEAD. We just wanted to have a word with you, Kennion.

TOM. I 'm off. Come along, Grace, Reggie.

MR. FOWLE. We 're not driving you away?

TOM. Not at all; going round to my mother's. We shall be back before you 've gone, I dare say.

(GRACE, REGGIE, *and* TOM *go out.*)

MRS. K. You want to have a talk with James, I suppose?

MR. LEAD. Only for a moment.

MRS. K. (*suddenly afraid*). It 's nothing about Arthur?

MR. LEAD. Arthur? No; why?

MRS. K. (*relieved*). I thought there might have been an accident, that 's all. (*She goes out.*)

MR. K. (*indicating the arm-chairs*). Now then, sit down.

(*He unlocks the sideboard cupboard with a key on his ring, and produces a box of cigars,*

a bottle of whisky, a syphon of soda, and a glass.)

MR. K. (*offering cigars*). Cigar ?

MR. LEAD. Thanks.

MR. FOWLE. I don't mind if I do.

MR. K. You 're a teetotaler, Leadbitter ?

MR. LEAD. Entirely.

MR. FOWLE. So are you, Kennion, aren't you ?

MR. K. Yes ; but I keep a drop for my friends.

MR. FOWLE (*seeing the whisky*). Aha ! That 's the right spirit.

MR. K. Help yourself, Fowle.

MR. FOWLE. I don't mind if I do. (*He mixes a stiff whisky and soda and returns with it to his chair.* MR. KENNION *turns round one of the chairs which are pushed under the dining-table and sits on it, between the arm-chairs, facing the fire.*)

MR. LEAD. What did your wife mean about Arthur ?

MR. K. He 's not come in yet. And she 's a bit anxious, as it 's getting late.

MR. FOWLE. Late ! You should see the time my lad Alan comes home. One or two in the morning sometimes. I pretend not to notice anything, but of course I 've a pretty good idea what he 's been up to.

MR. K. (*amazed*). But why do you allow it ?

MR. FOWLE. Why not ? Boys will be boys ; that 's only natural, you know. Besides, I 've been young myself.

MR. K. Surely it 's a father 's duty to——

MR. FOWLE (*interrupting*). To keep his eyes shut.

MR. K. I hold stricter views.

MR. LEAD. Of course you do, my dear Kennion.

So do I. Your views are unimpeachable, and it is for that reason that you find us here to-night.

MR. K. (*looking from one to the other*). I don't understand.

MR. LEAD. You are probably surprised to see us at this unearthly hour. We are on our way home from a meeting of the Council of the Liberal Association, where a decision has been arrived at that Fowle and I thought it advisable to acquaint you with immediately.

MR. FOWLE. Admirably put, old chap, but a little formal. Kennion isn't a public meeting, you know.

MR. LEAD. (*piqued*). Ask him yourself then.

MR. FOWLE. To cut matters short, we want to adopt you as Liberal Candidate for Longton Park Ward at the City Council Elections in November.

MR. K. Me? (*He rises.*) Gentlemen! My dear Leadbitter—my dear Fowle! (*He sits again.*) I am overwhelmed.

MR. FOWLE. Never mind that. Will you stand?

MR. K. Will I stand? (*He rises again mechanically.*) Upon my word, I don't know what to say. I shall have to think about it, to talk it over with my wife. But, believe me, I appreciate the honour—immensely.

MR. LEAD. We should like to have your decision not later than Monday evening.

MR. K. But why do you ask me? To win the seat from Grignall we shall need a very strong man indeed.

MR. LEAD. We are of opinion that you *are* a strong man, Kennion.

MR. FOWLE. You see it 's like this. The Nonconformist element is damn powerful in this ward. Now you 're a big gun at your chapel, and that 'll rake in a lot of votes. I 'm a Churchman myself, but I see that without the Nonconformist vote the Liberal Party here would be in the soup. Then Grignall 's a brewer and you 're a teetotaler. If we work it properly—temperance reform and social purity and all that game—we shall detach some of the temperance Conservatives.

MR. K. Are there any temperance Conservatives ?

MR. LEAD. In Municipal Elections, yes. Not in Parliamentary Elections.

MR. FOWLE. Down with the publican; down with the brewer. That 's the line we want to take. Good health ! (*He drinks.*)

MR. LEAD. Yes. Emphasise the fact that drunkenness is the cause of poverty.

MR. K. (*timidly*). But some people say that poverty is the cause of drunkenness, don't they ?

MR. LEAD. We can afford to ignore them ; it 's only Socialists who say that.

MR. FOWLE. Besides, hang it all, what does it matter what we say ? Between ourselves—all friends here—what we care about is knocking Grignall out, not about reforming social conditions.

MR. LEAD. I don't altogether agree with you, Fowle.

MR. K. I don't agree with you at all. I *do* care about improving the condition of the poor and helping them to keep out of temptation. If I 'm to be your candidate that must be understood.

MR. LEAD. By all means.

MR. FOWLE. All the better. If you 're so much in

earnest you 'll be all the stronger as a candidate. There 's no harm at all in meaning what you say.

MR. LEAD. The people who don't mean what they say are the bane of politics.

MR. FOWLE. Now, don't be so sweeping, Leadbitter. (*Rising to get some more whisky.*) Well, I think it 's a damn good wheeze putting you up, Kennion. You 're not too intellectual, like Leadbitter here; you 're the sort of honest, straight-forward man that electors take to at meetings. It 's my own idea; you 've got me to thank for it. Good health! (*He drinks.*)

MR. K. I 'm very much obliged to you and Leadbitter and all of you. If I accept your invitation——

MR. FOWLE. You 've got to.

MR. K. Well, I don't think there 's much doubt—you may rely on my putting up the best fight I can for you.

MR. LEAD. I 'm sure you will.

MR. FOWLE. Good luck to Councillor Kennion! (*He drinks the toast, as* MRS. KENNION *enters.*)

MRS. K. What *are* you talking about, Mr. Fowle?

MR. K. They want me to stand for the City Council, my dear.

MRS. K. (*excitedly*). Oh, James! How splendid! You will, won't you?

MR. FOWLE. There you are, Kennion. She 's settled it for you.

MR. K. I don't see why not.

(TOM KENNION *enters with* GRACE *and* REGGIE.)

TOM. Hello! What 's the excitement?

Mrs. K. Tom, what do you think ?

Mr. K. Hush, hush, Alice.

Mrs. K. I *must* tell them. James is going to put up for the Council.

Tom. Bravo !

Reggie. Hooray ! !

Mr. K. You mustn't go just yet, you two. Sit down again.

Mr. Lead. It is late——

Mr. K. Never mind, once in a way.

(*They pull out chairs, and form a big circle round the fire ; the men smoking.*)

Tom. Now then, Jim ; what about music in the parks on Sunday ? No voting against that, I hope.

Mr. K. (*with warmth*). I defend music in the parks. It keeps people out of the public-houses.

Tom. You might say that of bull-fighting or football.

Reggie. I don't see why there shouldn't be Sunday football.

Mr. K. There are many things you don't see yet, my son.

Mrs. K. Fancy you a Councillor, James.

Mr. Fowle. It may not stop at that.

Tom. Alderman !

Mr. Lead. Lord Mayor !

Mrs. K. A knighthood !

Mr. Fowle. And you 'd be Lady Mayoress, Mrs. Kennion.

Mrs. K. So I should.

Tom. That may not be the end of it. Member of Parliament perhaps.

Mrs. K. James !

TOM. The Cabinet; a peerage! Think of Chamberlain.

REGGIE (*coolly*). Aren't you all a little previous? Father may not be elected at all.

MR. K. Of course. We're all talking nonsense; we know that. But it's very pleasant to be sitting here round the fire talking nonsense for once in a way.

TOM. Wait till you're in the Council. You'll be able to talk it as much as you like then.

MRS. K. Won't grandma be surprised; and Arthur?

MR. K. By the way, where *is* Arthur? (*Looks at his watch.*) Half-past eleven!

MRS. K. He's never been so late before.

REGGIE. Hist! Some one now!

(*They all become absolutely silent and listen. A slight scuffling noise is heard in the hall, and then* MAGGIE'S *voice, distinctly.*)

MAGGIE. Now, do behave yourself, will you?

(*The noise is repeated.*)

Go straight upstairs to bed, now. Do, for goodness' sake!

(*After another slight scuffle the door is swung open violently, and* ARTHUR KENNION, *a handsome tall boy of twenty-one, with a strong face, appears hanging on to the handle. He is completely and benignantly drunk. He smiles round on the assembly, and with an erratic wave of his hand says,* 'Hello!' MAGGIE, *with her cap disarranged, hovers in the background prepared to support him. The curtain falls in a complete silence of horror.*)

ACT II

The same room early the following morning. Breakfast is laid for six; a cold tongue is on the table; but nothing hot, for no one is down yet.

MR. KENNION *dressed in his Sunday best, except that he wears a comfortable house-jacket in place of his frock-coat, enters the room briskly, looks round, goes to the bell and rings.* MAGGIE *enters after a moment.*

MR. KENNION. Breakfast ready, Maggie ?

MAGGIE. Yes, sir.

(MAGGIE *goes out, and* MR. KENNION *takes a small piece of paper from his pocket, studies it, and places it beside his plate on the table. The gong in the hall is rung loudly.* GRACE *enters.*)

GRACE. Good morning, father.

MR. K. Good morning, Grace. (*They meet in front of the fire, and* MR. KENNION *kisses her.*)

GRACE. How is mother ?

MR. K. Had rather a bad night. She isn't coming down for breakfast.

GRACE (*sorry*). Oh !

MR. K. No. She 's still too upset to come down. Will you let Maggie take breakfast to her room ? See to it yourself, dear; see that it 's nice.

GRACE. I 'll go now.

(GRACE *goes out just as* MAGGIE *with the tray enters.* MAGGIE *sets a dish of bacon and eggs at one end of the table and a big coffee-pot at the other. Toast also she brings.*)

MR. K. Ah, here we are. (*He sits down at the left hand end of the table.*) Just pour out my coffee, Maggie.

MAGGIE. Miss Grace *is* down, sir.

MR. K. I know; she 's seeing after your mistress's breakfast.

MAGGIE. Yes, sir. (MAGGIE *pours out a cup of coffee.*)

(MR. KENNION *helps himself to bacon and eggs, and begins breakfast.*)

MR. K. While I have the opportunity, I should like to tell you how sorry I am for what happened last night.

MAGGIE. What happened last night? (*She looks puzzled.*)

MR. K. For what Mr. Arthur did.

MAGGIE (*passing the cup*). What Mr. Arthur did, sir?

MR. K. (*irritably*). Come, come; what *did* Mr. Arthur do?

MAGGIE (*tolerantly*). Oh, nothing, sir.

MR. K. Nothing?

MAGGIE. Nothing to speak of.

MR. K. But I distinctly heard you say, 'Now, do behave yourself.'

MAGGIE (*reluctantly*). Perhaps I did, sir.

MR. K. What did you say that for, if he wasn't doing anything?

MAGGIE. Well, of course, he was trying to kiss me, sir.

Mr. K. Ah, that is what I thought. Maggie, I am deeply shocked. It is the first time a woman has ever been insulted under my roof. I will see that Mr. Arthur apologises to you at once.

Maggie. Oh, sir, I shouldn't like him to do that.

Mr. K. No self-respecting girl could be content with anything less.

Maggie. You see, sir, Mr. Arthur was a little jolly last night; and, after all, he only offered to kiss me.

Mr. K. Good gracious, isn't that bad enough?

Maggie. Believe me, sir. I don't mind it at all.

Mr. K. (*warmly*). Don't mind it! But you 've got to mind it, girl.

Maggie. I 'd much rather you'd let it rest.

Mr. K. Not on any account. It 's a matter of principle with me. Mr. Arthur has got to apologise to you before everybody.

Maggie. I couldn't listen to him, sir.

Mr. K. But I shall insist on your listening.

Maggie (*on the verge of tears*). Oh, sir. Don't humiliate me before everybody.

Mr. K. (*thoroughly aggravated*). Don't you see, girl, that you *have* been humiliated before everybody, and that 's why I insist upon this apology having the same publicity.

Maggie (*obstinately*). No, sir.

Mr. K. Don't argue with me about it, Maggie. I am your master, and you will have to do what I tell you.

Maggie. I 'd rather leave first, sir.

Mr. K. Don't talk nonsense.

Maggie. I don't mind being kissed by any one,

even by you, sir; but when it comes to being apologised to before everybody, just as if I 'd done something wrong——

MR. K. (*throwing himself back in his chair angrily*). Tchah !

MAGGIE. I 'd rather give you notice now, sir.

MR. K. (*quite rudely*). Very well, give me notice, then. (*She is going out when he speaks sharply.*) Tell Miss Grace her breakfast 's getting cold.

MAGGIE. Yes, sir. (*She goes out.* MR. KENNION *eats his breakfast in a perturbed way, and taking up the piece of paper from the table studies it irritably.*)

(GRACE *comes in.*)

MR. K. Bacon, Grace ?

GRACE. I 'll have some tongue, thanks.

(MR. KENNION *cuts and passes the tongue, and* GRACE *pours herself some coffee. She sits opposite* MR. KENNION *at the right-hand end of the table.*)

MR. K. Maggie has just given me notice.

GRACE. Maggie ? Oh, after last night, I suppose ?

MR. K. Not exactly. She prefers to go rather than receive a public apology from Arthur.

GRACE (*after a pause*). But if she doesn't want an apology——

MR. K. I want her to have one. Not so much for her sake, mind, as Arthur's. It will be good discipline for him.

GRACE. Did you say anything to Arthur last night ?

MR. K. I found it impossible last night. At first he persisted in trying to shake hands with me, and after that he became violently—er—ill. I

am very much upset about this, Grace. I 've been awake most of the night thinking it over. I 'm thankful your grandmother wasn't here; I think it would have killed her. The most unfortunate part of the whole business was Leadbitter and Fowle seeing it all.

GRACE. I don't suppose Mr. Fowle would be very shocked. He 's used to that sort of thing with his son Alan.

MR. K. That 's it! I 'd just let Fowle see distinctly what I thought of his way of managing his boy; and then, on top of that, Arthur comes in in this condition. Disgusting!

(GRACE *can hardly repress a smile.*)

Then, of course, there was Mr. Leadbitter. He must have been terribly shocked; a very strong teetotaler.

GRACE. It can't be helped now, father. After all, it doesn't matter as much as it would if they went to the chapel.

MR. K. But don't you see they 've asked me to stand for the Council just because of my views on the drink question? And now, after that—oh, it 's most ignominious!

GRACE. I dare say they 'll keep quiet about it.

MR. K. That doesn't alter the fact that I can't command their respect as I did. What do you think Fowle had the impertinence to say as he was going? He dug me in the ribs and said, 'Never mind, old chap, you 'll soon get used to it.' And I couldn't even answer him back.

GRACE. Some more coffee, father?

MR. K. No, thank you. I 'll have some marmalade. Then, of course, Grace, this business makes it awkward for me to meet Clifford Rawson this afternoon. I wish he weren't coming to-day.

GRACE. Why ?

MR. K. Because I intended to talk to Arthur about him ; to ask him if Clifford is steady. Now, of course, I should not be inclined to place much reliance on Arthur's opinion.

GRACE. It 's very unfair to mix Clifford up with this.

MR. K. I 'm not doing so, my dear. Though now I come to think of it I shouldn't be surprised if Clifford *had* been mixed up in it.

GRACE. Father !

MR. K. He is a great friend of Arthur's. I shall certainly ask Clifford what *he* was doing last night.

GRACE. It is very unkind of you to be so prejudiced against him.

MR. K. If he is innocent he will have no difficulty in telling me what he was doing. I am not going to let you be engaged to him until I have made the fullest inquiries. It 's not surprising that I should be suspicious when I find out that my own three children have been deceiving me.

GRACE. I thought you weren't going to say any more about that, father.

MR. K. No, I won't. But there 's Arthur as well ; and now, I may inform you, Reggie.

GRACE. What has Reggie been doing ?

MR. K. You will know in good time. Just ring that gong again.

(GRACE *goes into the hall and bangs the gong very loudly and long.* MR. KENNION *fills his pipe, still at the table, though he has now finished breakfast.*)

MR. K. That 's enough, Grace !

GRACE (*returning*). I expect they 're all asleep.

MR. K. You 'd better have this bacon sent out to keep warm for your uncle.

(GRACE *rings the bell.*)

By the way, you won't be going to Sunday-school this afternoon, Grace, if Clifford is coming ?

GRACE. I think not.

MR. K. No. Better not.

(REGGIE *enters, buttoning up his waistcoat.*)

REGGIE. Morning, everybody. (*Goes to table.*) I say, this bacon 's cold.

MR. K. That 's your fault.

REGGIE. I 'll have some tongue.

(MR. KENNION *cuts tongue for* REGGIE. MAGGIE *enters.*)

GRACE. Take the bacon and eggs and keep it warm till I ring.

(MAGGIE *takes the dish and goes out.*)

MR. K. You 're very late, sir.

REGGIE (*sitting, facing the fire, on the chair nearer to* GRACE). The gong's only just gone.

MR. K. For the second time.

REGGIE. I didn't hear it. (GRACE *gives* REGGIE *coffee.*) I 'm jolly hungry.

MR. K. (*dangerously civil*). Didn't you have a good meal last night at that teetotal restaurant that you 've forgotten the name of ?

REGGIE (*looking at him curiously*). Yes. Pretty fair.

MR. K. (*quietly*). After I locked up last night I found a paper on the hall floor, underneath the peg on which your overcoat was hung up; it had evidently fallen out of the pocket.

(REGGIE *stares at* MR. KENNION.)

It was a bill with the heading 'Hornet Hotel,' Liverpool.

(REGGIE *noiselessly ejaculates* 'Damn.')

I have it here. I 'll read it. 'Two sherry and bitters, one shilling. Two table d'hôte dinners at half a crown, five shillings. One flask of Chianti, No. 74, three and sixpence. Coffees, eightpence. Liqueurs, one shilling. Cigars, one shilling. Total for two persons, twelve shillings and twopence.'

(*He lays the bill down and looks at* REGGIE, *who has been eating stolidly with his eyes on the plate.*)

REGGIE. I don't see that you ought to read my private papers.

MR. K. It *is* yours, then? I thought so, since you were the only member of the family at Liverpool yesterday. Now I ask you whether you don't consider it an extravagance to pay—how much—er—twelve shillings and twopence——

REGGIE. More.

MR. K. More?

REGGIE. Gave the waiter a bob.

MR. K. Gave the waiter a bob. Of course; in your position you would do. Thirteen and twopence for a meal for two persons. Six and sevenpence each!

REGGIE. It 's not out of the way for dinner.

MR. K. You could have got a very good meat tea for a shilling.

REGGIE. I don't like meat teas.

MR. K. You 're accustomed to them at home.

REGGIE. That 's no reason why I should go looking for them when I 'm away.

MR. K. I don't know what the younger generation is coming to. Do you know that the money you two boys spent on one dinner would have kept a working man and his family for a whole week ?

REGGIE. Well, I dare say the money some people spend on one dinner would keep a working man and his family for a whole year.

MR. K. But it 's not so much the extravagance. It 's that you should deliberately go to an hotel, and drink wine ! Wine, a boy of your age ! And worst of all, that you should come home and lie about it.

REGGIE. You 're so unreasonable. It 's better to keep some things from you.

MR. K. Be quiet, sir. Grace tells me an untruth, then you come in and do the same. The only good thing about Arthur's affair is that he didn't tell a lie about it.

REGGIE. That wasn't his fault. He wasn't in a position to. There 's no knowing what he 'd have done if he 'd been sober.

MR. K. I am hoping that this wretched business of Arthur's may be a lesson to you, and that is why I am not going to say much more. (*He rises and speaks with some emotion.*) You are approaching the critical years of your life, when you will form habits and friendships that will determine what

sort of a man you will be. I pray that you will grow up a good man, Reggie, a Christian man; and it is my duty to watch over you to the best of my ability.

(*A pause.* MR. KENNION *is slightly moved, and* REGGIE *is slightly ashamed and cannot say anything.*)

GRACE. If you 're going up to mother, ask her if she wants any more toast, father.

MR. K. (*recalled to earth*). Eh ! Er—yes, I will.

(MR. KENNION *goes out.*)

REGGIE (*grumbling*). I wish father wouldn't pray over me. It 's taking a mean advantage of a fellow. I can't answer him back like I can when he 's angry.

GRACE. I suppose it makes you feel ashamed of yourself.

REGGIE. All right; *you* don't need to take up such a high and mighty attitude. You 've been doing something wrong yourself, it appears.

(GRACE *haughtily rises from the table without answering, and sits in the left-hand arm-chair before the fire.*)

I suppose he 's caught you messing about with Clifford Rawson, and you 've been telling fibs about it.

GRACE. Will you please mind your own business, Reggie ?

REGGIE. I 'm not blaming you. We 're all in the same boat, it seems. We 've simply got to tell fibs to father, because he thinks that we 're always trying to do something wrong. He 's got it into his head that we want to bolt down the broad

road that leads to destruction, and he spends his time dragging us back into the narrow path. As if a man can't have a little dinner with a pal without all this fuss. Strikes me the narrow path 's for people with narrow minds.

GRACE. It really is simply awful now we 've all grown up. At least, now Arthur and I are grown up.

REGGIE. Thank you, I 'm nearly twenty myself. Wait till I 'm twenty-one; I 'll show you how to manage father, then. In a way I rather admire Arthur for breaking out like this. Though of course he was a fool to come home while he was in that state. He ought to have gone for a long walk. I know I should.

GRACE. Father 's terribly upset about it. There 'll be an awful row.

REGGIE. He 's not talked to Arthur yet ?

GRACE. No.

REGGIE. Saving it up, I suppose. He thinks it more Christian to be angry in cold blood. Personally I think it shows a nasty spirit.

(*The door opens slowly and* ARTHUR *comes in. He stops and looks round the room. He is subdued but not sheepish.*)

REGGIE. It 's all right. Father's not here.

ARTHUR (*casting a crushing look at* REGGIE). Breakfast ready, Grace ?

REGGIE. It was ready about two hours ago. (*Imitating* MR. KENNION.) Late again, sir. I don't like it on a Sunday morning.

ARTHUR (*ignoring him*). You might pour me some coffee, Grace.

REGGIE. But I dare say you had a bad night.

(ARTHUR *sits at table with his back to the fire.* GRACE *pours out coffee.*)

REGGIE. How 's your head this morning ?

ARTHUR (*dangerously*). Shut up !

GRACE. What are you going to have ?

ARTHUR. What is there ?

GRACE. Some tongue there.

(ARTHUR *draws the tongue towards him and contemplates it.*)

Or there 's some bacon and eggs in the kitchen.

ARTHUR (*with a shudder*). Bacon and eggs ! Ugh ! (*He gets up.*) I don't think I 'll have anything. (*He sits in the right-hand arm-chair.*)

REGGIE (*eyeing him sympathetically*). What *you* want is a brandy and soda.

ARTHUR. Isn't father up yet ?

GRACE. Yes ; long ago. And not in a very good temper. Maggie has just given him notice to leave.

ARTHUR (*guiltily*). Maggie ?

REGGIE. Because of what took place between her and Arthur last night ?

GRACE. No ; I understand it 's because of what took place between her and father this morning.

ARTHUR. Hello ?

REGGIE. I say, what 's the dad been up to ?

GRACE. Don't be absurd. He says Arthur has got to apologise to her before every one, and she doesn't want him to.

ARTHUR. I don't mind apologising to Maggie if I behaved like a cad, but I 'm not going to have it made into a public ceremony.

REGGIE. You shouldn't have made a public ceremony of kissing her then. You might have waited until Uncle Tom had gone.

ARTHUR. What! Was Uncle Tom here?

REGGIE. Didn't you notice a stranger?

ARTHUR. I thought I saw several. Was it only Uncle Tom?

REGGIE. No, you were not deceived. There *were* others. You chose a night when there was quite a nice little reception on.

ARTHUR. Who were they?

GRACE. Mr. Leadbitter and Mr. Fowle, come to ask father to put up for the City Council.

ARTHUR (*groaning and sinking into his chair*). Oh, my goodness!

REGGIE (*lighting a cigarette*). Yes. There 'll be a holy row. I wonder what father will say to you.

ARTHUR. I 'm thinking about what I shall say to father.

REGGIE. Shouldn't say anything. You 'll only make things worse.

ARTHUR. Never mind that.

REGGIE. Besides, he won't let you get a word in edgeways. He 's too fond of talking. I expect he 'll pray over you.

ARTHUR. He 'll have to listen to me. I 'm going to have some alterations in this house. That affair last night was only the beginning.

REGGIE. Do you mean you 're going to get drunk every night?

ARTHUR. Don't talk rot. I mean that he 's got to treat me differently. I 'm going to have more freedom.

REGGIE. Oh! While you 're about it you might put in a word for us; eh, Grace?

GRACE. I quite agree with Arthur. We ought to have more freedom.

ARTHUR. I 'm going to tell him so.

REGGIE. Quite right. If things are to go on as they do at present, I shan't stand it. I shall go to Australia.

GRACE. I thought it was Canada.

REGGIE. No, on second thoughts, Australia. It 's further away.

(TOM KENNION *comes in.*)

TOM. Sorry I 'm so shockingly late. Good morning, Grace. Morning, Reggie. (*He shakes hands with them.*) And this is Arthur, isn't it? I 've seen you, but you 've not seen me. Good morning, Arthur.

(*He shakes hands heartily with* ARTHUR.)

ARTHUR. Good morning, Uncle Tom.

GRACE. Sit here, uncle. (TOM *sits in the seat on the left of* REGGIE, *facing the fire.*) Ring the bell, Arthur. (ARTHUR *rings the bell.*) Do you like tea or coffee?

TOM. Tea, if it 's all the same to you. I can't get decent tea in Hamburg.

REGGIE. It 's getting late. I must go and shave.

TOM. Why, I thought you had shaved (*looking at his chin*).

REGGIE. No, I shave after breakfast on Sunday.

(REGGIE *gets up and goes out.* MAGGIE *comes in with bacon and eggs and a small teapot.*)

GRACE. Will you make some tea quickly, Maggie?

MAGGIE. I 've brought you some, miss. I thought the coffee would be cold.

GRACE. That 's right. (MAGGIE *goes out.*)

(TOM *helps himself to bacon, and* GRACE *gives him tea.*)

TOM. I 'll help myself. There 's not much time to lose. I suppose you 're all off to chapel ?

GRACE. Oh yes. You 'll come too ?

TOM. I suppose so.

GRACE. I must go and get ready, if you 'll excuse me. Grandmamma will be here soon.

TOM. On her way to chapel ?

GRACE. Yes. She always goes with us.

(GRACE *goes out.*)

TOM (*after a pause*). Feeling better this morning ?

ARTHUR. Yes, thanks.

TOM. You 'd been having a lively time last night, young man.

ARTHUR. I suppose you despise me for it ?

TOM. Not in the least.

ARTHUR. What would you say if I told you I 'd never been drunk before ?

TOM. I should be very much surprised.

ARTHUR. It 's the truth. Don't you believe me ?

TOM. Of course I do, if you say so.

ARTHUR. It 's the first time in my life I 've ever been drunk.

TOM. Never mind ; it won't be the last.

ARTHUR (*thoughtfully*). I don't suppose it will. There 's a good deal to be said for getting drunk occasionally.

TOM. I quite agree with you.

ARTHUR. By Jove, you *are* different from father !

TOM. You don't get on with your father ?

ARTHUR. No. At least, not very well in some

things. I should get on all right if he 'd only let me alone a bit more.

TOM. Do you expect him to have any greater confidence in you after last night ?

ARTHUR. Good gracious ! father 's never *stopped* me from doing anything I wanted to. A fellow can find ways to do things, however suspicious his father may be. Only, of course, I 'm obliged to do them in an underhand, secret way, and that 's what I object to. I don't want to tell lies and deceive father ; but when he thinks it 's a deadly sin to drink a glass of beer or to go to a music-hall, what else can I do ?

TOM. You can tell him straight out that you intend to have your glass of beer and your music-hall.

ARTHUR. I can now, but I couldn't before I was twenty-one. It means a row, you know.

TOM. Never mind that.

ARTHUR. Then of course I 've always tried to spare his feelings and save him worrying himself. Where ignorance is bliss 'tis folly to be wise ; and if he 'd known I went to music-halls he 'd have thought I was going straight to hell.

TOM. Very considerate and thoughtful of you. All the same, have it out with him. It 'll do you both good.

ARTHUR. I 'm going to. That affair of mine last night was a sort of symbol of revolt ; throwing down the glove, as it were.

TOM. I see ; but was there any need to throw it down quite so violently ? (TOM *rises, having finished breakfast.*)

ARTHUR. Perhaps not ; but I had my reasons for

doing it that way. (TOM *sits in the left-hand arm-chair and lights his pipe.*) You know, Uncle Tom, I like you immensely. It 's surprising how different your views are from father's.

TOM. We 've lived our lives in different places.

ARTHUR. You were both brought up together?

TOM. Yes; but I soon got away from Salchester and all its narrowness and bigotry, whilst your father has lived here all the time. That 's the difference between us.

ARTHUR. Why did you leave home?

TOM. Couldn't stand it any longer. When I was a boy I was rather like you are now.

ARTHUR (*interested*). Really?

TOM. I felt just like you do, probably, only I was worse off. My parents were much stricter than yours are.

ARTHUR. Impossible.

TOM. Yes, they were. Just think of what my mother—your grandmother—is even now.

ARTHUR. She 's pretty awful, isn't she?

TOM. All of our set were like that in those days. It was understood that you were to have a good time in the next world provided you were miserable in this one. Well, as I say, I couldn't stand it. I quarrelled with your grandfather, and cleared out. First I got a place with a firm in London, and after that I went to Hamburg as their agent, and I 've never regretted it. If I 'd stayed at home I dare say this place would have been too much for me, and I 'd have given in to its influence like your father has done.

ARTHUR. You think it 's the place?

TOM. Certain of it. This Sunday morning brings it all back to me. Sunday-school and chapel in the morning, and as likely as not the minister for dinner. And the roast beef and Yorkshire pudding completely spoiled for us boys because he persisted in examining us in points of theology during the meal. Sunday-school again in the afternoon, chapel in the evening. We couldn't talk about things that interested us, we couldn't laugh, we couldn't run about, we couldn't read anything except the Bible. Gad, how well I remember it! (*He shudders.*)

(*The church bells begin to ring in the distance.*)

ARTHUR. Thank goodness, it isn't quite as bad as that now!

TOM. No; even here the times have changed a little. Look here; you and I won't go to chapel this morning. We 'll stay at home instead and have a long talk.

ARTHUR. All right. (*He laughs.*) You evidently don't know what a big thing you 're asking me to do.

TOM. Why?

ARTHUR. I 've never stayed at home from chapel before, except when I 've been ill.

TOM. Of course; I was forgetting. Never mind, then.

ARTHUR. No; I 'll stay at home.

TOM. Is that a bargain?

ARTHUR. Yes; I 'm in for a row already; I may as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb.

(MR. KENNION *comes in, having changed his house-coat for a frock-coat.*)

MR. K. Good morning, Tom. Had a good breakfast ?

TOM. Splendid, thanks, Jim.

(MR. KENNION *stands and looks severely at* ARTHUR.)

MR. K. (*severely*). Arthur, I am not going to speak to you now, before chapel. There isn't time. I will see you after dinner. You are not to go out this afternoon. (ARTHUR *rises.*) Do you understand ?

ARTHUR (*sullenly*). Yes, father. (ARTHUR *goes out of the room.*)

MR. K. (*shaking his head*). Tom, I 'd give a hundred pounds if I hadn't to have this interview with Arthur. (*He sits in the chair* ARTHUR *has left.*)

TOM. Can't you overlook it ?

MR. K. How can I ?

TOM. Let him off lightly, then.

MR. K. You 're a bachelor; you don't understand. You 've got no children of your own. I have a duty to perform.

TOM. Arthur's only very young.

MR. K. I know. That 's why there 's still a hope of reclaiming him.

TOM. Reclaiming him ! Good Lord ! Jim, you were young yourself once.

(*They look gravely at each other for a space.*)

Do you remember that night you and I and Frank Hewett got drunk at the Royal George ? Do you remember us singing hymns outside Alderman Macdougall's shop in the High Street, until a policeman came up and tried to move us on ? Have you forgotten that it was you who pushed

the bobby through the Alderman's plate-glass window? And surely you haven't forgotten how he chased us down High Street and along Kersley New Road, and how we climbed over Dr. Watson's wall and hid in the bushes until he 'd gone by?

MR. K. You may be sure I 've never forgotten that night, Tom. It 's one of the few things in my life I sincerely regret. It took place nearly thirty years ago, but I 'm still ashamed of myself.

TOM. Rubbish.

MR. K. I 've often wanted to pay for that window, but I never knew how to without giving myself away.

TOM (*laughing*). Ha, ha!

MR. K. I always blame Frank Hewett for that night. He led us astray. And look what a mess he made of his life afterwards.

TOM. Yes, poor chap.

MR. K. But that was the only time, Tom. It was a lesson to me. I 've never tasted alcohol since that night.

TOM. Perhaps this will be a lesson to Arthur too.

MR. K. I hope so.

TOM. Well, it 's a good thing he doesn't know about Alderman Macdougall's window, or it would rather spoil the effect of your sermon.

MR. K. No one knows about it except you.

TOM. Mother never got to hear about it, did she?

MR. K. Good gracious, no! I shouldn't like mother to hear about it even now.

(MRS. KENNION *rustles in, attired in her Sunday best, all gloves, umbrella, and hymn-book.*)

MRS. K. Good morning, Tom.

TOM. Good morning.

MRS. K. Are you nearly ready, James? The bells have started.

TOM. What bells?

MRS. K. The church bells.

TOM. But you go to chapel, not to church.

MRS. K. There 's no reason why we shouldn't use their bells, is there?

MR. K. (*who has been looking out of the window*). Here 's mother.

MRS. K. There 's a collection to-day, James, isn't there?

MR. K. Yes.

MRS. K. Have either of you got two threepenny-bits for a sixpence?

MR. K. No.

TOM. No.

MRS. K. I shall have to give sixpence then.

TOM. That won't break you, will it?

MRS. K. No; but you see James collects, and so he always puts a five-shilling piece in the plate before he begins, and I think that 's quite enough from one family.

(MRS. HANNAH KENNION, *an old, hard-featured but dignified woman of seventy-five, comes in slowly, dressed in widow's weeds. She carries a big hymn-book, a Bible, and an umbrella.* GRACE *follows her in.*)

MRS. K. (*kissing the old lady*). Well, mother?

(MR. KENNION *kisses her, and then* TOM *does.*)

TOM. Good morning, mother.

MRS. HANNAH. It 's a long time since I had both my boys here on a Sunday morning.

(*They arrange the left-hand arm-chair for her and she sits.*)

TOM. Quite like old times, mother.

MRS. HANNAH. You are very fortunate, Thomas. The Rev. Basil Macnamara is preaching this morning.

TOM. Is he really ?

MRS. HANNAH. A very powerful preacher.

TOM. I hope he doesn't preach very long sermons.

MRS. HANNAH. No. Never more than thirty-five minutes. Sermons aren't what they used to be.

MR. K. Mother thinks we 've changed for the worse, Tom.

MRS. HANNAH. I do, indeed. By the way, James, I hear that man Roberts is to be made superintendent of the Sunday-school. Is it true ?

MRS. K. Surely not.

MR. K. I believe so.

MRS. HANNAH. I am very much surprised.

TOM. Why, what 's wrong with Mr. Roberts ?

MRS. HANNAH. He is unfit for the position, I consider. He 's not a gentleman.

TOM. Oh !

MRS. HANNAH. He is only a working carpenter.

(*A pause.*)

TOM (*quietly*). It was a carpenter who was crucified, mother.

(*A slight pause.*)

MRS. HANNAH (*shocked*). Please don't be irreverent, Thomas.

TOM. I hadn't the least idea of being.

MRS. HANNAH. I 'm afraid it 's done you no good being in Germany. A place where the theatres are open on Sunday. Little better than heathens.

(REGGIE *comes in ready for chapel.*)

REGGIE. Morning, grandmamma.

MR. K. Where 's Arthur ?

REGGIE. Upstairs, I think. (*Calling through the door.*) Arthur !

ARTHUR (*in the distance*). Well ?

REGGIE. Father wants you. (*Feeling his chin, he addresses the company generally.*) I wish I could afford one of those safety razors.

MR. K. You 'd soon be able to afford one if you 'd save your money instead of spending it foolishly.

(ARTHUR *comes in, without his hat.*)

MR. K. Come, Arthur, aren 't you ready ?

ARTHUR. I don't think I 'll go to chapel this morning, father. I 'll stay at home with Uncle Tom.

(*General astonishment.*)

MRS. HANNAH (*looking at him*). Thomas !

TOM (*shamefacedly*). I—er—thought of staying at home.

MRS. HANNAH. I hope you 'll do no such thing, Thomas. Now you have come back, after all these years, I expect you to take me to chapel.

TOM (*penitently*). Very well, mother, of course I will.

MRS. HANNAH. I should think so.

(*She rises.* TOM *gives her his arm.*)

MRS. HANNAH (*handing him her Bible and hymn-book*). Carry these.

(MRS. HANNAH *and* TOM *go to the door.*)

ARTHUR (*to* TOM *as he passes*). Coward ! (TOM *smiles.*)

(MRS. HANNAH *and* TOM *go out.*)

MRS. K. Aren't you well, Arthur ?

ARTHUR. Quite well, thank you, mother.

MR. K. Then what 's all this about not going to chapel ?

ARTHUR. I don't feel inclined to go.

MR. K. Don't feel inclined ! What has that to do with it ? *I* don't go to chapel because I feel *inclined* to go.

ARTHUR. Don't you ? I always thought you did.

(ARTHUR *takes a novel from a table, sits in the right-hand arm-chair, and takes out a cigarette.*)

MR. K. Do I understand that you refuse to go ?

ARTHUR. If you like to put it that way, yes.

(MR. KENNION *stands nonplussed. Then he turns to the others, who are dumb with astonishment.*)

MR. K. Come, Alice, you 'll be late. Reggie ! Grace !

(*He waves them out. They go unwillingly. After a moment's hesitation he approaches* ARTHUR.)

MR. K. Arthur, for the last time, are you coming ?

ARTHUR (*reading the book*). No, father.

MR. K. (*suppressing his righteous anger*). I 'll talk to you this afternoon, sir.

(MR. KENNION *stalks angrily from the room.* ARTHUR *lights his cigarette as the curtain falls. The chapel-goers, headed by* MRS. HANNAH, *pass the window in single file,* MR. KENNION *bringing up the rear. The church bells are still ringing in the distance.*)

ACT III

The same room. The time is about half-past two in the afternoon of the same day as Act II. Dinner is cleared away. There is a dish of fruit on the sideboard, and a dish of nuts with a pair of crackers.

GRACE *is sitting in the right-hand arm-chair, and* ARTHUR *in the left-hand one. Both are reading novels.*

ARTHUR (*looking at his watch*). I wonder how long father will be.

GRACE. I expect he doesn't want to talk to you so soon after dinner.

ARTHUR. Why ? I want to go out.

GRACE. It must be bad for any one who suffers from indigestion to be angry immediately after a heavy meal.

ARTHUR. There 's no need for him to be angry.

GRACE. I think he 'd have got over it by this time if he 'd been left to himself, but I expect grandmamma has been rubbing in the moral.

ARTHUR. Grandmamma ! Does she know ?

GRACE. I think so.

ARTHUR. About—last night ?

GRACE. Father and mother were talking to her very earnestly after chapel. I couldn't manage to hear what they were saying, but I expect it was about that.

ARTHUR. What on earth 's he told her for ?

GRACE. Goodness knows!

(REGGIE *comes in.*)

REGGIE. Hello! Any fruit knocking about? (*Seeing the fruit.*) Here we are.

(REGGIE *takes the fruit and the nuts and places them on the dining-table. Then he sits on the corner of the table and devours grapes while he is talking.*)

GRACE. Aren't you going to Sunday-school to-day?

REGGIE. No. I sent word I couldn't go because we 'd got an uncle from abroad staying with us.

GRACE. What an excuse!

REGGIE. Well, why aren't *you* at Sunday-school?

GRACE. Never mind. I've a much better reason than you.

REGGIE. Not got it over yet, Arthur?

ARTHUR (*shortly*). No.

(ARTHUR *and* GRACE *read their books.*)

REGGIE. Well, here 's luck! (*He eats a grape.*) My advice to you is stick up to the old man. Don't let him do all the talking. After all, what *is* a bit of a blind occasionally? It does you good. (*He is eating grapes between the sentences.*) Getting drunk takes you away from the sordid realities of every-day life, as Shakespeare says. It 's a sort of romance. And goodness knows there 's not too much romance in this blooming hole! I don't know how people stick it. Uncle Tom couldn't, you see. He went abroad, and so shall I. I've finally decided; I shall go to New Zealand. What I want is ' a man's life.'

GRACE. I wish you wouldn't talk such rot, Reggie.

(*She resumes her novel.*)

REGGIE. No, I mean it. Arthur feels just the same as I do; only I 'm going to New Zealand and he went on the razzle. It 's quite natural. You tell father that; say I said so.

ARTHUR. Shut up!

REGGIE (*aggrieved*). All right; I 'm only trying to help you. We ought to all stick together now.

GRACE. I quite agree with Reggie there, Arthur.

ARTHUR. What about?

GRACE. *We* ought to make a stand as well as *you*.

ARTHUR. I can manage all right alone, thanks.

GRACE. I don't mean for your sake; I mean for ours. We 're all in the same boat just now.

REGGIE. That 's what I say. Of course, I 'm not as bad as you two. What have *I* done? Nothing! A little dinner with a friend, that 's all. But I 'll stand by you all the same.

GRACE. It 's a good opportunity to make father understand that we 're not children any longer.

ARTHUR. Mother *and* father. She 's as bad as he is.

GRACE. Oh, mother will do anything father does.

REGGIE. Yes; she 's one of the old school of females.

GRACE. They are so unreasonable about little things.

REGGIE. They 're out of date, that 's what 's the matter. And as for grandmamma, she 's worse than out of date. She 's what I call early Victorian.

GRACE. I shall be twenty-three next month, and just think what girls of twenty-three do nowadays.

REGGIE. Yes. Lots of them have been in gaol.

GRACE. I shall tell father that he 's got to treat me differently.

REGGIE. So shall I. Bravo! Arthur, this is all

owing to you. You raised the signal of revolt, and I honour you for it. (*He puts an apple in one pocket and some nuts in the other.*) If I 'd thought about it I 'd have done it myself.

(REGGIE *goes out.*)

ARTHUR. Silly young ass! (*To* GRACE.) You 're serious about this?

GRACE. Absolutely.

ARTHUR. I think you 're quite right.

GRACE. By the way, was Clifford Rawson with you last night?

ARTHUR (*guiltily*). Er——

GRACE. Oh, it 's all right. Don't be afraid to tell me. I don't mind if he was.

ARTHUR. Well then, he was.

GRACE. I thought so. Was he—er—— ?

ARTHUR. I don't know.

GRACE. Don't know?

ARTHUR. I mean, I don't remember. But I don't think so. I had a particular reason for getting—er—like I was, and he hadn't.

GRACE. Never mind. I shall lecture him.

ARTHUR. Don't say I gave him away.

GRACE. It doesn't matter. I 'm not angry, although I don't approve of that sort of thing very much. But I don't altogether object to a boy getting drunk now and then before he 's married; it acts as a sort of safety valve. The people I *do* object to are the people who never touch alcohol under any circumstances. They nearly always turn out confirmed drunkards.

(MR. KENNION *comes in. He looks at* GRACE.)

MR. K. I want to speak to Arthur alone, Grace.

GRACE. Very well, father.

(GRACE *gets up, and with a parting smile at* ARTHUR, *goes out.* MR. KENNION *uneasily strolls across the room, up to the bow window; fidgets about, and then returns to the hearth-rug, where he stands and looks at* ARTHUR, *who has remained in the arm-chair all the time.*)

MR. K. Maggie has been to me to withdraw the notice she gave this morning. It appears you have already apologised to her.

ARTHUR. Yes; I apologised to her in the kitchen when you were at chapel.

MR. K. In the kitchen! Well, I must be content with that, as Maggie objects so strongly to a more public apology.

(ARTHUR *does not reply, and* MR. KENNION *sits in the left arm-chair.*)

(*Quietly.*) Well, Arthur, I have been thinking all this over. I 'm not going to get into a rage and play the angry father; although, Heaven knows, I might well be pardoned for doing so. But I try never to speak in anger, and I cannot forget that you are a man now; you are twenty-one. But, Arthur, if I am to treat you as a man I expect you to behave like one. I don't need to tell you that I was terribly shocked by that awful scene last night; nor what is worse, that you have thoroughly upset your mother and your grandmother.

ARTHUR. Why did you tell grandmamma?

MR. K. I didn't. It was your mother. I should have kept it from grandmamma, but she saw

that something was wrong by your refusing to go to chapel, and she tackled your mother and got it out of her. . . . Very well, that is the most painful result of your behaviour. Then there is the effect upon Reggie. Reggie's character is not very strong, I am afraid, and I 'm deeply grieved that he should have seen you in that condition. I tremble to think what may be the consequence of such an example to a young and innocent boy. . . . Then again there is Mr. Leadbitter and Mr. Fowle. Think of it! You disgraced yourself and me before two gentlemen who have just honoured me by showing their confidence in my principles and my good influence! It is quite possible that they will not care to ask me to represent them now.

ARTHUR. They are men of the world, father.

MR. K. Men of the world! I hate that term. It is our duty to keep ourselves unspotted by the world. At any rate, I am not going to hold them to their invitation if they already regret it. I met Mr. Leadbitter this morning and told him so.

ARTHUR. What did he say?

MR. K. He told me not to worry my head about it. He told me that he would say nothing about the matter, and that he was sure Mr. Fowle wouldn't.

ARTHUR. Then that will be all right, father.

MR. K. No thanks to you, sir, if it is. Think how this undermines my self-respect. How am I to help to manage the affairs of a city, when I can't keep my own son in order? And think how awkward it will be during the election if this gets about.

ARTHUR. I 'm very sorry, father; but I don't think it will spoil your chances.

MR. K. Sorry, sir; sorry! Are you nothing more than sorry? But I 've only mentioned the *results* of your behaviour; how it affects other people. I want to talk about how it affects yourself. I want to point out to you the immorality, the licentiousness of your conduct.

ARTHUR. There 's no need to. (*He rises.*)

MR. K. (*also rising, angrily*). There *is* need to. All the more because I 'm afraid you don't realise the seriousness of your offence. You 're behaving too callously. What did you mean by refusing to go to chapel?

ARTHUR. I didn't want to go.

MR. K. People don't go because they want to; they go because it 's their duty.

ARTHUR. I can't see any use in going to a religious service unless you go willingly.

MR. K. What do you know about it?

ARTHUR. I 'm quite old enough to decide for myself.

MR. K. What do you think would be the result if every one followed his personal inclinations without restraint?

ARTHUR. Liberty.

MR. K. Rubbish. Anarchy! You can't do exactly what you like in this world. You have to be bounded by certain conventions.

ARTHUR. Yes; only people have never been able to agree about those conventions. And they never will.

MR. K. You 're talking nonsense. You say you stayed at home this morning because you *wanted*

to. Did you get drunk last night because you *wanted* to ?

ARTHUR. Yes, certainly.

MR. K. What ! You *wanted* to get drunk !

ARTHUR. I did it deliberately.

MR. K. Good heavens !

ARTHUR. I got drunk as a symbol of revolt. I wanted to show you that I 'm going my own way in future.

MR. K. Do you mean to say that you 're not in the least ashamed of yourself ?

ARTHUR. Not at all. I 'm proud of it. (*He sits.*)

MR. K. That you are actually proposing to get drunk again ?

ARTHUR. Not very often, because you don't feel well after it. But I shall if I want to.

MR. K. Then you 'll do it in somebody else's house, not in mine.

ARTHUR. I should like to point out that you take a much too serious view of getting drunk.

MR. K. It 's a degrading, beastly habit.

ARTHUR. Yes; when you make a habit of it. Done occasionally, it has its advantages.

MR. K. (*grimly*). Perhaps you will be good enough to mention them. (*He sits again.*)

ARTHUR. To begin with, it does away with Puritan ideas. A Puritan is a person who gets on a pedestal to look at the rest of the world. Getting drunk knocks him off the pedestal.

MR. K. But why should he be knocked off ?

ARTHUR. Because he 's a human being like the people he 's looking down on. Only gods should stand on pedestals.

MR. K. Arthur, I believe you 're going mad.

ARTHUR. Now *you 're* a Puritan, father.

MR. K. I am very proud to be called a Puritan.

ARTHUR. It 's a mistake. It would do you a world of good to get drunk.

MR. K. How dare you ?

ARTHUR. It would, really. At present you think you 're perfect.

MR. K. I know I 'm very far from perfect, but I do what I can to show people the right way.

ARTHUR. But how do you know that you know the right way ? Then again, getting drunk is only one way of letting off surplus steam. Every one has to let off his surplus steam.

MR. K. Every one doesn't get drunk.

ARTHUR. Not with beer or whisky perhaps, but there are other ways. A revival meeting is a form of drunkenness ; it is a religious debauch.

MR. K. Upon my word, Arthur, you are perfectly scandalous.

ARTHUR. No ; I 'm perfectly serious. The Salvation Army is only a substitute for the public-house.

MR. K. And a very good substitute too. I suppose that in your enthusiasm for drunkenness you are prepared to defend the drinking habits of the working-classes ?

ARTHUR. Certainly. The working man isn't poor because he gets drunk. He gets drunk because he is poor. He is too poor to afford any other form of pleasure.

MR. K. Pleasure !

ARTHUR. Of course ; it *is* pleasant to get drunk, though it 's beastly unpleasant afterwards. It

takes those poor beggars away from their awful surroundings for a few hours. It makes them forget that next week they may not have enough to feed their wives and children.

MR. K. No wonder, if they spend their money in drink. But you, you and your friends, haven't that excuse. *You* don't need to drug yourselves in order to forget your surroundings.

ARTHUR. Yes, we do. We get fearfully depressed at times. Do you suppose that a young fellow with hot blood likes stuffing in a dreary office or warehouse six days a week? He wants to be *doing* something, not writing in ledgers and answering the telephone. I don't blame him for breaking out sometimes. Of course, he breaks out in different ways. There 's Reggie, for instance, always wanting 'a man's life' in Canada. That 's one form of it; getting drunk is another.

MR. K. I shall decline to listen to you any more. I don't know where you 've got these ideas from.

ARTHUR. They are in the air, nowadays.

MR. K. I won't have them in my house. (*He rises.*) Now, Arthur, understand me—if you are to remain at home you 'll have to behave yourself.

ARTHUR. I 'll promise to behave myself—that is, not to come home drunk or do anything outrageous—if you will promise not to be always asking me where I 've been or where I 'm going.

MR. K. (*pathetically*). But I *must* keep an eye on you, my boy.

ARTHUR. No, you 've got to trust me; you must give me a latch-key.

MR. K. I don't know whether you 're old enough for a latch-key.

ARTHUR. You are anxious enough to get me on the register with a lodger's vote; if I 'm old enough to settle the affairs of the nation, surely I 'm old enough to have a latch-key.

MR. K. I shall have to think it over. I don't quite know where I am to-day. (*He passes up and down, perplexed.*)

ARTHUR. Thank you, father.

MR. K. (*quickly*). Mind, I don't promise. I must think about it.

(REGGIE *comes in quickly.*)

MR. K. What do you want ?

REGGIE. Clifford Rawson's come !

MR. K. Clifford Rawson ! I 'd forgotten all about him. Where is he ?

REGGIE. In the drawing-room with Grace.

MR. K. With Grace ! (*Sharply.*) How long has he been here ?

REGGIE. I don't know.

MR. K. Where 's your mother ? Go and find her; tell her I want her.

(REGGIE *goes out.*)

MR. K. Grace had no right to see Clifford alone. Too bad of her.

(REGGIE *opens the door again.*)

REGGIE. Here 's grandmamma.

(REGGIE *disappears as* MRS. HANNAH *enters.*)

MRS. HANNAH. Good afternoon, James. (*Looking at* ARTHUR *disapprovingly.*) Well, sir ?

ARTHUR (*rising*). Good afternoon, grandmamma.

MRS. HANNAH (*sitting in the left arm-chair*). Aren't you ashamed of yourself ?

MR. K. I have already spoken to Arthur, mother.

MRS. HANNAH (*contemptuously*). All this is owing to your mistaken leniency. You don't know how to manage a son.

MR. K. (*nettled*). I ought to know. I had the advantage of your training.

MRS. HANNAH. Yes. You were more fortunate in your parents than Arthur is.

(MRS. KENNION, *followed by* TOM *and* REGGIE, *comes in.*)

MR. K. (*to* MRS. KENNION). Clifford Rawson is in the drawing-room with Grace. I shall have to go and see him. Will you come with me or not ?

MRS. K. What do you think ?

MR. K. I think you 'd better.

MRS. K. What are you going to say to him ?

MR. K. I 'm not quite certain.

MRS. HANNAH. That was always your great fault, James ; you never could make up your mind.

MR. K. I like to try and be fair, mother ; and see both sides of a question.

MRS. HANNAH. It 's best to see only one side, if you wish to get your own way.

(TOM *has seated himself by the desk on the left, where he smokes and watches the others.* ARTHUR, *after rising, has pushed the right arm-chair further to the right, away from the hearth.* MRS. KENNION *is standing by the right arm-chair,* MRS. HANNAH *sitting in*

the left one, ARTHUR *beside* MRS. KENNION, *and* MR. KENNION *in the middle of the group, near the table.* REGGIE *is behind the table, helping himself to fruit.*)

(*The door bursts open and* GRACE *enters dragging in* CLIFFORD RAWSON, *an ordinary, good-natured, pleasant young fellow of twenty-four.*)

GRACE. Clifford and I want your consent to our engagement, father.

MR. K. Grace! This is too bad of you, really.

GRACE. What is?

MR. K. Taking us by surprise like this. (*To* CLIFFORD.) Good afternoon.

CLIFFORD. Good afternoon, sir. (*To* MRS. KENNION.) Good afternoon. (*He bows to* MRS. HANNAH *and* TOM.)

GRACE. That is our Uncle Tom.

TOM. How do you do?

CLIFFORD. Pleased to meet you.

MR. K. Was there any need for this hurry, Clifford?

CLIFFORD. It 's not my fault, Mr. Kennion. Grace insisted on coming in and asking you at once.

MRS. HANNAH (*snorting*). Upon my word! I don't know what girls are coming to.

MRS. K. It really *is* most embarrassing, Grace.

TOM. Perhaps I 'd better withdraw.

GRACE. Certainly not, Uncle Tom. Clifford doesn't mind. Do you, Clifford?

CLIFFORD (*looking round*). Er—no. I suppose not. I want Mr. Kennion to say yes, that 's all.

MR. K. Before I can say 'yes' there are certain questions that I should like you to answer.

TOM. I 'm sure I 'd better clear out. Come along, mother.

(*He offers his arm to* MRS. HANNAH.)

MRS. HANNAH. Certainly not. I shall stop here.

MR. K. Where were you last night, Clifford ?

CLIFFORD (*startled*). Last night ?

MR. K. Yes. Were you with Arthur ?

(*A pause.* CLIFFORD *looks at* ARTHUR *and raises his eyes inquiringly.*)

MR. K. Come.

CLIFFORD (*taking the plunge*). Yes ; I *was* with Arthur.

MR. K. Ah ! I 'm glad *you* haven't told me a lie, at any rate.

CLIFFORD. You see, I wasn't certain whether you knew or not.

MR. K. You admit you were with Arthur last night. That admission makes it easier for me to give you an answer at once. I haven't sufficient confidence in you to allow Grace to become engaged to you.

CLIFFORD. But why ?

MR. K. I 'm sorry—I don't think you are steady.

CLIFFORD. What reason have you for thinking that ?

MR. K. You are a friend of Arthur's, for one thing.

CLIFFORD. What ! I 'm not fit to marry your daughter because I 'm a friend of your son !

MR. K. Arthur came home disgracefully drunk last night.

CLIFFORD. He 's never done such a thing before.

MR. K. How do I know that is true ?

CLIFFORD. Ask any of the fellows. Why, he doesn't

care for beer, and he positively hates whisky! He got drunk last night quite by accident.

MR. K. He told me he did it on purpose, as a symbol of revolt.

CLIFFORD. No; it was an accident.

ARTHUR. I don't see what all this has to do with Grace's engagement.

CLIFFORD (*hotly*). Here 's Mr. Kennion objecting to me because of your disgraceful behaviour. I 'm only telling him that you 're not so bad as he thinks you are.

ARTHUR. Just mind your own business, please, Clifford.

CLIFFORD. It *is* my business. (*To* MR. KENNION.) Look here, sir, Arthur and I and some of the fellows went into the Royal George smoke-room last night for a drink. Arthur was talking about the way you are always nagging at him and asking him where he 's been, and he said he wasn't going to stand it any longer. We sympathised with him, of course, and advised him to have it out with you. Well, he said he would if he could only make up his mind, only he was a bit afraid of tackling you. We advised him to have a whisky and soda to buck him up. He had a couple, but still he funked it. You see, the idea was to screw his courage up to sticking point, so we persuaded him to go on with the whisky and soda. Unfortunately, he isn't accustomed to drinking spirits, and we made a mistake and screwed him up too far. In fact he got completely screwed.

ARTHUR (*indignantly*). You 're a low cad to give a fellow away like this, Clifford.

MR. K. (*to* ARTHUR). I thought you got drunk as a protest, a symbol of revolt.

ARTHUR (*annoyed*). I know I said I did. I thought I might as well make the best of it after it had happened.

MR. K. I am very glad to find that you 've not been as bad as I feared. (*To* CLIFFORD.) However, this explanation doesn't make any difference to my opinion of you. I like you, Clifford, I always have liked you; but you haven't the strength of character that I should wish to see in the man who is to marry Grace.

GRACE. Father, I don't at all insist on strength of character in my husband.

MR. K. (*grimly*). I do, my dear.

GRACE. But *you* won't have to live with him. If I 've got to live with a man all my life he ought to be some one *I* like, not some one *you* like.

MRS. K. I wish you wouldn't put it like that, Grace. 'Live with a man!' It doesn't sound proper.

MR. K. Let me try and make you see this in a reasonable light.

MRS. HANNAH. Now you 're going to give in to them, James.

MR. K. I am not going to give in to them, mother.

GRACE. Then it 's really no use continuing the conversation.

MRS. K. (*pathetically*). Oh, Grace, do listen to your father; he means well.

MRS. HANNAH. Girls didn't behave like this when I was young.

MR. K. I hope you are not going to be stubborn, Grace, and upset your mother. We have had

enough worry with the three of you; you and Arthur and Reggie.

REGGIE. There! Now I'm to be dragged into this, I suppose. I'm sure I've not done anything very serious.

MR. K. You've told me a lie.

REGGIE. Oh, you've got to tell a good many fibs before you die.

MR. K. It is not a matter of telling fibs. You have all three told me downright, elaborate, calculated lies. If there is one thing I object to it is a lie.

ARTHUR. I don't know how you get on in business if you never tell one.

MR. K. I prefer to tell the truth even if I lose money by it. (*To* GRACE.) Now, Grace, are you going to be reasonable?

GRACE. I want to marry Clifford.

MR. K. No.

CLIFFORD. But give me your reasons.

MR. K. I *have* given them.

CLIFFORD. You said something about strength of character——

MR. K. If you wish me to put it plainly, I'm afraid you drink.

CLIFFORD. I don't.

MR. K. Have you ever been drunk?

CLIFFORD. Once or twice.

MR. K. (*with a gesture*). Very well! What did I say?

CLIFFORD. Getting tight once or twice isn't the same as drinking.

MR. K. If there is a difference it is not worth discussing.

CLIFFORD. But you must know that every fellow gets drunk some time or other.

MR. K. I hope not, for the sake of this country. The man who has once been drunk is never to be relied on. He may break out at any time.

ARTHUR. Father, you 're so unreasonable! You must have been young once. (*A slight pause.*) Have you never been drunk yourself?

MRS. K. (*reproachfully*). Oh, Arthur!

MR. K. (*staggered*). What do you say?

ARTHUR. Have you never been drunk yourself?

(*A pause.* MR. KENNION *slowly turns his head and looks at* TOM, *who, with a suppressed giggle which he turns into a laugh, rises quickly and walks to the bow window, where he stands with his back to them all, looking out of the window.*)

MRS. HANNAH. This is the new-fashioned way of bringing up your children, James. My children never put such a question to me.

MRS. K. Arthur, how can you ask your father such a thing?

ARTHUR. I notice he hasn't answered me.

MR. K. (*collecting himself*). Eh? What 's that?

ARTHUR. I say you haven't answered me.

MRS. K. It isn't necessary for your father to answer such a question.

TOM (*coming down*). Why not?

MR. K. Do you think it is?

TOM. Certainly. It is very necessary. If you refuse to answer, Arthur and the others would be justified in putting the worst construction on your refusal.

MR. K. Very well (*with an effort*). I have never been drunk in my life.

(*A pause.*)

MRS. HANNAH. I brought up my boys strict tee-totalers. I don't know what habits you have contracted in that dissolute Germany, Thomas; but I feel sure James, at least, has never touched a drop of intoxicating liquor. Have you, James?

MR. K. (*dully*). No, mother.

ARTHUR. What! Never?

TOM (*quietly*). You don't suppose that your father would tell you a *lie*, do you, Arthur?

(MR. KENNION *casts an agonised glance at* TOM, *and goes to the table, where he sits with his back half turned to them all, resting his head on his hands.*)

MRS. K. There, now, you 've upset your father.

CLIFFORD. I 'm sorry to interrupt this discussion, but it really doesn't interest me. I want to be engaged to Grace, and I don't mind at all whether Mr. Kennion was ever drunk or not. I shouldn't let that affect our engagement in the least.

MRS. HANNAH. Young man, since my son doesn't seem disposed to answer you, I 'll answer you myself. Our family has always been a strict, upright, God-fearing family. My grandfather was a disciple and a friend of John Wesley himself. We 've always tried to keep up the tradition in the family. Some of the younger members have fallen away sadly, of late; but I blame their father, my son James, for that. They say he 's been too harsh with them; I say (*with great force*) that he 's not been harsh enough. There 's

original sin in every young man and young woman, and it 's got to be stamped out of them. Yes, scourged out of them with whips, and burnt out of them with fire if need be. James has been to blame in that respect; but it can't be helped now, it 's too late. But it 's not too late to refuse to admit you into the family. There 's no need to let Grace marry a light-minded and vicious man, when she might marry a God-fearing man who goes to the chapel.

GRACE (*protesting*). Grandmamma.

MRS. HANNAH. If I 'd my way I 'd put her under lock and key if she refused to obey her parents, just as I 'd turn my son out of doors if he came home drunk. (*She looks at* ARTHUR.)

ARTHUR (*quietly*). We are in the twentieth century now.

MRS. HANNAH. Thank God I shall not live to see the twenty-first !

MRS. K. (*moved*). Mother, I can't bear to hear you say such things. I know my children have been very wrong and sinful, but I can't forget that they are very young. They 'll be less hasty when they grow older, and they 'll think more about what they are doing. James couldn't dream of doing what you suggest, mother; and if he did, I wouldn't let him.

MRS. HANNAH. You 're not of my generation, Alice. You 're of a younger and softer generation.

MRS. K. (*her eyes full of tears*). I 'm thankful I am. Your generation is too hard for me.

(MAGGIE *comes in with a letter.*)

GRACE. What is it, Maggie ?

MAGGIE. Mr. Fowle has sent this note across, miss, for the master. There 's no answer. (MAGGIE *goes out.*)

MRS. K. (*taking the note from* GRACE). Father, here 's a letter from Mr. Fowle.

MR. K. (*rousing himself*). Eh? Thank you. (*He takes it, opens it, and reads it.*)

TOM. This is no business of mine, I know; but perhaps you won't think it impertinent if I say a few words.

MRS. K. Of course not, Tom.

TOM. To begin with, I 'm afraid we can't adopt your suggestions, mother.

MRS. HANNAH. *You* never would take my advice, Thomas.

TOM. No. I was too young to take your advice once, and now I 'm too old. This is *my* proposal:

(MR. KENNION *listens.*)

Consent to an engagement between Grace and Clifford. Let them see each other freely, for a year, at least. Only let Clifford understand that he is on probation; that he 's got to behave himself.

CLIFFORD. I 'll promise that.

TOM. I think you may. It makes a wonderful difference to a fellow when he has an object in life. As for Arthur. If you 'll allow me, Jim, I 'll take him back with me to Hamburg, and find him plenty of work to do. (*To* ARTHUR.) Will you come?

ARTHUR (*jumping at it*). Rather!

MRS. HANNAH (*to* ARTHUR). Yes. That 's what *you* want. To get away from the restraint of home.

TOM. Why not? It 'll do him good. Home life is not an unmixed blessing. Now, Jim, what do you say?

MR. K. (*rising*). I 've been thinking it all over, Tom, while I 've been sitting here. I will admit that I 've changed my mind to some extent.

TOM. Ah, something has made you change your mind.

MR. K. Yes; something. Clifford, Grace, I think we had better do what Uncle Tom suggests.

GRACE (*throwing her arms round him*). Dear father!

CLIFFORD (*grasping his hand*). Thank you, sir.

MR. K. But mind, Clifford—Grace, you 're stifling me—you must deal honourably with me.

CLIFFORD. I will.

MR. K. And if you like to take Arthur for a year or so, Tom, I think it would be a good idea.

ARTHUR. Thank you, father.

TOM. Then that 's all right.

MRS. K. I 'm so glad we 're not going to have any difficulty. I 'm sure it 's all for the best.

(MRS. HANNAH *snorts*.)

TOM. What does Fowle say, Jim?

MR. K. Fowle? Oh yes. (*Referring to the letter*.) He says:

> 'Don't be a fool. You 've got to stand for the Council. You are an honourable man with a clean record, and they 're not so easy to find nowadays. Leadbitter and I won't breathe a word about high old times on Saturday night, if that 's what you are afraid of.'

GRACE. That 's not all, father. (*She has been looking over his shoulder*.)

MR. K. That is all that matters.

GRACE. Oh, listen to this. (*She takes the letter.*)

'I rather admire Arthur. He is a young sport. I didn't think he had it in him.'

MR. K. There was no need to read that, Grace. However, I shall stand for the Council, after all.

GRACE. I hope you 'll get in, father. You deserve to. (*She kisses him.*) Clifford, there 's a fire in the drawing-room. Come along.

MRS. K. You 'll stay to tea, Clifford ?

CLIFFORD. Thanks very much.

(CLIFFORD *and* GRACE *go out.*)

TOM. I 'm off early to-morrow morning, Arthur. If you 're coming with me you 'll have to pack up to-night.

ARTHUR. I 'll begin now. Will you come and help me, mother ?

MRS. K. Yes, dear, in a little while.

(ARTHUR *runs out.*)

REGGIE (*coming forward*). Look here, what about me ?

MR. K. Well, what about you ?

REGGIE. You 've fixed up Arthur and Grace all right ; it 's my turn now. I 'm going out to Canada.

MRS. K. Don't be silly, dear.

REGGIE. I 've made up my mind. I shall go out to join Tommy Leslie. All I want is a hundred pounds for my outfit, and to give me a start over there.

MR. K. And where are you going to get your hundred pounds ?

REGGIE. I want you to lend it me.

MR. K. Do you? You will have to want a long time.

REGGIE. It 's jolly mean of you. Uncle Tom, will *you* lend me a hundred pounds?

TOM. I 'm afraid I haven't got it about me just at present. (*He feels in his pockets.*)

REGGIE. You 've no need to make fun of me, any way. You don't sympathise with me, that 's what it is. You don't know what it is to want to live ' a man's life.' Wait until I 'm twenty-one. You 'll see.

(REGGIE *goes out sulkily.*)

(MRS. HANNAH *rises slowly.*)

MRS. K. Are you going, mother?

MRS. HANNAH. Yes.

MRS. K. Won't you stay to tea?

MRS. HANNAH. No, I will not stay to tea.

(MRS. KENNION *goes to the door to see* MRS. HANNAH *out.*)

MRS. HANNAH. You 've given in to them, James. *I* wouldn't have given in to them.

(MRS. HANNAH *goes out, proud, stern, and erect.* MRS. KENNION *follows.*)

MR. K. (*as soon as they are gone*). Tom! I told a lie.

TOM. Yes. A pretty big one too.

MR. K. Good God! After what I had just been saying about telling the truth! But what could I do? Could I have told them about getting drunk and breaking Alderman Macdougall's window and being chased by a policeman?

TOM. You *could* have told them, of course.

MR. K. Reggie, and Arthur, and Grace! And mother too. What would she have thought about me?

TOM. It would have done mother good to know that her system didn't work as well as she thinks it did.

MR. K. But do you blame me? Where would my authority have been if I 'd told them?

TOM. I think you did quite right, old fellow. And it will do *you* good too. You won't be so inclined to get on a pedestal and look down on the rest of the world, in future.

MR. K. Get on a pedestal! That 's what Arthur said to me this afternoon.

TOM. Ah! That lad has some good ideas in his head. He only needs letting alone.

(MRS. KENNION *returns.*)

TOM. Mother gone?

MRS. K. Yes.

TOM. I 'll just run after her and walk home with her. She 's a little put out, I 'm afraid. I 'll see whether I can talk her round.

(TOM *goes out.*)

(MRS. KENNION *sits in the left arm-chair.* MR. KENNION *draws the right arm-chair up to the hearth.* MRS. KENNION *has her handkerchief out.*)

MRS. K. I hope it 's all for the best. We seem to be out of sympathy with mother, and with the children too.

MR. K. Mother is very old, and the children are very young. We must make allowances for them.

(MR. KENNION *sits in right arm-chair.*)

MRS. K. I sometimes wonder whether *we* are quite right after all.

(MRS. KENNION *wipes her eyes.* MR. KENNION *leans forward and pats her knee gently. They sit staring into the fire for a very long time; silent, immobile. The curtain creeps down very, very slowly.*)

Printed by T. and A. CONSTABLE, Printers to His Majesty
at the Edinburgh University Press

THE WORKS OF STANLEY HOUGHTON

VOLUME I

CONSTABLE : 1914

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